

The World Is My Playground

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Summary: The only way to conquer desire is to give in to it. If you find a worthy opponent to play against, you might enjoy the game. Take the risk and get lost in it. Rated M for containing sex and adult themes. (Joe x OC) (Joe x Cameron) (Joe x Sara) Season 1 & Season 2

1. Everything is bigger in Texas

****Everything is bigger in Texas****

There is nothing more to do. If there must be a winner, naturally there must be a loser, too. IBM could have sent God himself and they still couldn't stand a chance. It's fascinating how differently people react to defeat. You watch their faces and you can clearly see as the realization sinks in. Fighting is part of the human nature. But at one point or another, they give up.

The room is silent. Whatever the people "sent by the mighty company of IBM" thought before they stepped into this building, it's time for them to reconsider. They've put on their nice suits, got into their fancy cars and was fool enough to think they can do whatever they want. What they didn't know was that Cardiff Electric just hit the jackpot.

On the winning side of the table, Lorena Maze leans back in her chair, grinning like a sated beast. Gordon looks nervous, he can't read between the lines. It's not a criterion to his profession, still restlessly prancing around under the table with his legs.

"I don't know how long you want to continue our little staring contest, but to be honest, I'm starting to get really bored."

Gordon stops moving, looking at the woman. Though she's smiling, her tone sounds serious enough to kick the loser side of the table out of their trance. The bloodthirsty lawyers of IBM must take the walk of

shame. They leave without a word.

John Bosworth suddenly feels the perfect opposite of what he felt a week ago. He's ecstatic.

When he heard the first story about a "Bull" nicknamed lawyer who gave a handful of Apple's jurists a run for their jobs, he got rather interested. A friend from New York offered him to ask around and check the availability of that "Bull". John needed someone. Or something. A miracle would've been more than preferable. It took a few days but eventually he received the call he's been waiting for. His miracle was on the way but when it arrived, it looked nothing like he imagined.

The "Bull" was not only a woman but a woman who was more than easy on the eyes. She preferred form fitting dresses, usually ending just below the knees, never a suspiciously flashy neckline - leaving much of the work for the imagination, her attire always paired up with ridiculously high heels in which she walked like she was born into. But Lorena was more than just a pretty face. She proved herself to be particularly dangerous. Graduated from Columbia with a summa cum laude degree, and at barely thirty, she was more feared by many companies than almost anyone in the business. She got that specific nickname for a good reason. Her presence made it impossible for her to be ignored and this was exactly her key to every door she wished to open.

They're sitting in a line at the table when Bosworth returns the room, unable to hide the relieved happiness from his face. Surprisingly, only Lorena seems to share the same emotions. Gordon is visibly exhausted. The man is a stress factory, he would deserve an award for still being alive after all the mental abuse he lays himself to by his own self. He takes off his glasses with slightly shaking hands.

Cameron is sitting on a chair with her knees drawn to her chin. She's fed up already. She's looking for a fraction of Joe's attention, trying to catch a glance but his eyes are fixed on the wall.

Joe MacMillan. He should not only be happy and satisfied with the outcome of this whole circus but be grateful at least. Yet, his expression mirrors something utterly different. Lorena breaks the silence for them.

"Is this how you celebrate in Texas? I'm more than let down. Next time I'd rather visit a funeral."

Cameron jumps on her feet and storms out the door without a single word. She's offended and tired. She was bossed around all day long, other people told her what to do, what to say. She's nothing but a puppet. She blames the only person possible. The same person who seems to be fairly interested in her for ten minutes, then forgetting about her whole existence for who knows how long before starting it all over again, on repeat.

Gordon is unsure of what his next move should be. He's obviously feeling uncomfortable but he's not yet ready to draw up why. He needs to figure himself out.

Bosworth gives up. He can't force a good mood, he rather leaves.

"Lorena, very nice job. I hope we can talk about your future plans at Cardiff. If it wasn't for you, IBM would've butchered us." The slight reproach in his voice goes undoubtedly for Joe.

Lorena feels the need to provoke something out of the peeved manchild. The guy is a mystery wrapped in at least ten layers of crazy, hiding behind a mask of a dick. As irritating as he is, this is still the type of puzzle that tickles the mind to be solved.

"I can't help but realize how disappointed you look. I kind of wonder why."

He answers without looking at her. "I was hoping for a little more excitement."

So this is how he wants to play. He was feeling left out the whole time while Lorena took the attention and all the glory with it. Now he's acting like she's not even there. Pathetic, but works. It's not even a question if he found the right spot to hit. They are miserably alike.

"I didn't know it was your show I was stealing, Joe. Should I apologize?" She gets nothing but a slight headshake and a flagrant smirk. She's clenching her fists. First mistake, Ms. Maze. She wanted to provoke him but walked into his game instead.

Lorena stands up, trying to look like she's calm while pushing the two empty chairs between them out of the way, standing before the man. He's sitting with his arms crossed on his chest, the light blue shirt tight on his shoulders, still refusing to make eye contact. He really is a grandiose specimen of his kind. He has played this game before, that's for sure.

"I'm deeply sorry. Did I bore much?" The woman's sarcastic tone puts a grimace on his face.

"Not more than the usual." With an unexpected move, he slightly strokes her thighs through the delicate material of her dress, getting on his feet in a threateningly slow motion. He grabs Lorena by the shoulders to make her back up against the wall.

She's more than impressed. After all those years she spent at different offices with different type of pricks who called themselves men, no one ever dared to lay a single fingertip on her. Yet, here's this arrogant dick, who thinks he can do whatever he likes to after barely a week of acquaintance.

Placing his palms on the wall next to both sides of the lawyer's head, he bends down to get their eyes on the same level. His height is more than intimidating, and so is the width of his shoulders. Joe leans unnecessarily close to her face, his grin is growing. He looks way too pleased with himself.

Lorena couldn't ask for a more perfect moment to grab his most sensitive part, not specifically gently. Watching the self-sufficient smile melting away from his face is gilding her whole day. Now it's her time to grin. Especially after feeling his reaction to the moderately painful touch. He's rapidly hardening in her hands. She purrs into his ear.

"If I were you, I would watch what I say." He closes his eyes, inhaling sharply. At this point, he's ready for anything. She giggles lightly and as her hot breath reaches his neck, an electric shock runs down his spine.

Who's game is it now? Time to score, Ms. Maze.

Lorena lets go of his member, pushing him away with a firm move. She turns back from the door before leaving the man alone.

"You know, Joe, it really is bigger in Texas."

2. RESPECT

****R.E.S.P.E.C.T.****

Joe rips the door open and shuts it in full fling after stepping into Lorena's office. It takes all of his concentration not to start yelling right away. The woman is sitting at her desk, twitching a little by the unexpected sound before looking up from a pile of papers, the pen stops moving in her hand. She takes notice of the long crack on the glass door. Her eyes wonder from her damaged property to the raging man.

"Welcome to my little nest. I would've invited you over to take a look but as far as I can see it, you have already invited yourself."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" He reaches her desk with three ridiculously long steps, towering above her.

"Calm down." She points at a chair. Her coolness is simply exceptional. "Here, have a seat and tell me what's hurting your little heart."

Joe laughs with disbelief. "Don't even start it, I don't have time for your bullshit. Are you questioning my decisions?"

"No, of course not. I'm not questioning them. I simply disagree with them. Especially the ones you make about me." The secret weapon of Lorena. She can offend anyone while using the calmest, easiest tone humanly possible. It drives people wild rapidly and Joe is obviously not much different.

"You bitch. You go behind my back and make it look like my words mean nothing at all? I told you to stay out of it, didn't I? So you ran to Bosworth? That's how you do it? That's your method? Was flashing your panties enough or did you have to make more effort to change his mind?" The man is practically shouting at the woman, his hands are shaking. The perfectly set hair - that usually makes all the secretaries in the building losing their wet panties - now looks somewhat tousled, his eyes are burning. An exquisitely magnificent sight.

Satisfied with the effect she made, Lorena stands up from her desk and steps in front of the furious man, almost pushing herself to him. The sarcastic smile she generally spares for Joe is nowhere to be found.

"Shut up! Just shut up. Don't you ever dare talking to me in that tone again. Now skip to the point where you finally spit out what the fuck do you want."

"Here is what I want: I want you to respect me. Because I'mâ€¦" He has his speech ready but Lorena interrupts.

"I know who you are. So what? Respect is not something you get for free. You don't earn it with the title on your nameboard. You want respect? Fine. Show me something I can respect you for. Oh, and just a hint: throwing a tantrum in my office will definitely not do the job." The woman turns her back on him, taking her seat behind the desk again. She picks up her pen like nothing ever happened and goes back to work. Joe forgets to breathe for a moment. He's rarely ever found himself against such an intense contempt. He's stunned but Lorena is not finished just yet. "Let's forget about how you made an ass out of yourself and meet me at the elevator in an hour. And for now, please close the door behind you and don't forget to call someone to fix that shit."

"Am I thrown out?"

"See you in 59 minutes, Joe."

* * *

><p>The plan was good and simple. Maybe too simple to be true. Their attempt to make LouLu Lutherford provide the money Cardiff needs seems to fail miserably. Bosworth can be more than fine with words but this time, it might be far from enough. Joe struggles through the whole evening. His dislike toward their host makes everything he puts into his mouth go bitter. Even Lorena's presence doesn't seem to bother him anymore. He's so done with making dumb people understand what his idea is about.<p>

By the end of the dinner, they can officially call their visit a failure. When Joe disappears from the table, Lorena throws a questioning glance at Bosworth. He assures the lawyer that he doesn't have a clue what's going on. She can't miss the smell of distress from a thousand miles, politely excusing herself before leaving the dining room. She walks around the empty place. It seems like every single guest is enjoying the dessert at the table except for her and Joe.

She finds him a couple minutes later while having a very different kind of dessert after dinner, right at the middle of the wine cellar. Lorena bites on her lower lip when she finally steps into the room, mesmerized by the surprise she found, unable to take her eyes off of Joe using his tongue expertly on the lucky guy. LouLu's boyfriend moans with pleasure. The moment Joe takes notice of her from the corner of his eye, she flashes a wild grin, leaving the room as quietly as she arrived. She grabs a full glass from a table on her way back, being in a desperate need for something to cool herself down. She's too turned on for her own good.

* * *

><p>When Joe steps out on the huge porch of the Lutherford Mansion the first thing he's acknowledging is her. She's sitting in a deck chair, holding a huge glass of white wine in her hands with legs

crossed. For the very first time in years, he just wants to run away. But it's too late. It takes less than a millisecond for Lorena to realize she's not alone anymore. As much as Joe wishes he could simply turn around and leave, he can't do that. He never does. Backing out of a situation without a win is never an option. If the woman thinks she can daunt him like this, she must be out of her mind.<p>

Lorena can clearly feel the hesitation and she's having more fun than ever before since their arrival. At first, she thought this event was predestined to be boring. What a nice change of things.

Joe takes his jacket off and drops it on the back of a chair next to the woman before flinging down to it. He lays casually, it's almost believable. Lorena remains silent on purpose. The tension coming from the man is hardly ignorable. He inhales deeply and before he could decide if he should strangle the irritating lawyer or rather drown her in that wine, she turns to face him, raising her glass.

"Congratulations, Mr. MacMillan! John told me about the good news. You got the money." She takes a sip of the pale liquid. "What a surprise. Can I ask you something? Are you the boy or the girl?" He gives her an invidious smile in return. "Come on, don't give me that look. Do you scorn me for being curious?"

"Lorena, I scorn you for so much more than just being curious."

"Don't hurt my feelings, Joe. Instead, tell me if you do it a lot? Or just occasionally? Only for business reasons or maybe even for fun? Oh, and does Cameron know about this hobby of yours?"

* * *

><p>Joe is driving home like a lunatic. He won. He got the prize that he wanted but it all means nothing since he got defeated by Lorena Maze. His muscles are so tense, they hurt. When he steps out of the elevator and reaches for the door of his apartment, it's already unlocked.<p>

He finds Cameron in the living room with her feet resting on the table. Good, she got the message. She's here as he wanted her to be.

â€žWhat doâ€| " She hasn't got a chance to finish her first sentence. Joe rushes to her and pulls her up by the collar of her jacket. His kiss is violent, biting her lip so harshly, it starts to bleed. Cameron pushes him away and wipes the blood off her lips with the back of her hand. She looks and feels terrified. Joe can't contain his rage anymore. He grabs her up, pushes her against the wall with his full weight. The girl is so small and fragile in his arms, so vulnerable. She's breathing heavily, her legs wrapped around his waist.

It's always the same thing. She hates him so much, yet wants him so badly she gets wet by a single touch of his fingertip. But today is different. Cameron never saw him like this before, looking equally wicked and desirable. He wants her so badly that the feeling of his need makes her unable to take her hands off of him. She's wishing for

more hands to touch him with, stroke him, grab him. With a single move, he rips the clothes off of her body. Her petite figure is so small comparing to his. Joe grabs her tightly, rushing into the bedroom. She gets dropped down onto the bed, watching with hungry eyes while the man frees himself from his clothes in three seconds. His erection is massive. Cameron drops her head back in anticipation. He barely lingers for a second at her entrance before pushing himself all the way inside. She's ecstatic. She wants to scream with delight, but the way he takes over her body is so good, even her voice gets lost. Joe pins her hands down to the mattress above her head while pounding inside of her furiously. When closing his eyes, he sees nothing but Lorena biting her lips in the wine bitch.

* * *

><p>They lay beside each other, still panting. Joe turns to Cameron, stroking some hair out of her face.<p>

"Do you respect me?" She looks at him with her doll-like blue eyes, only hesitating for a blink.

"I do."

3. The Lone Star State

****The Lone Star State****

The arrival of the journalist takes everyone by surprise. Though no one heard a word about him planning a visitation at Cardiff, nobody needs to ask who made it possible for him to step right into the middle of their project. Joe didn't consider it as an important factor to share his plans with anyone. All he needs is a good enough reason to make people talk about his genius, and let the world hear about Joe MacMillan's name.

The idea is good. If the article would be written, the next chapter of Cardiff's story could begin right away. The only problem is, Wall Street Quarterly journalist, Ron Kane is not really interested in the story, and he doesn't even try to make a secret about it. His only reason to accept the invitation was the rumour he heard about their lawyer riding roughshod over IBM. He knew Lorena Maze, he was writing about her winning cases before, and it seemed interesting enough to find out why would someone as successful as her, move from New York to a no name company in Texas.

Things are quickly going from bad to worse when Cameron's fresh out of the oven bios code gets accidentally deleted. She spent days and nights working on it and however hard she tries, she can not bring it back. The panic is spreading quickly.

Gordon feels like the entire world is closing around him. He worked too hard to let everything go now. He wants to make it this time, he needs to get somewhere with his life. He runs straight to Cameron's filthy basement office. The place Gordon never even felt the need to visit before.

Joe takes a minute to get himself together. It all happens too often with him. He used to feel like he was favoured by the Gods, but ever since Lorena appeared in his life, it seems like he's running out of

luck. His frustration grows minute by minute. The man has to make sure about what kind of a story he gets in return before joining Gordon for a desperate attempt to save the day.

Joe walks into Lorena's office to find her sitting in an arm-chair, her long legs in their usual position, crossed on one another; the red shoes are not on her feet. She's reading the latest issue of the Wall Street Quarterly. Joe's appearance leaves her unbothered. The woman turns a page and keeps on reading without looking up from the magazine.

"Put your shoes on and find Kane. We lost the bios." Joe's tone is impatient. The simple sight of the woman makes him lose his temper. It's a brand new problem for him and still haven't figured out how to handle it.

Lorena could barely show less interest about the problem, her ignorance is a hit on the face. "Why should I care?"

"Because if it's falling apart now, if I fail, I take you with me. Think about your favorite thing in the world: your reputation."

She can't help but smile, turning another page. "Are you threatening me?"

Joe steps closer to her. "It's not a threat, it's a promise."

She closes the paper and drops it on her desk, finally looking at the man. "Wow, Joe. I'm flattered. You must be practicing these speeches a lot." Her sarcastic tone makes wonders on people. Especially on him.

Joe gets divested of his chance to say another word. A nervous looking guy from the design team rushes into Lorena's office, informing them about the most important topics: A) the bios code is gone indeed, B) Cameron is raging like a lunatic and C) Gordon's wife, Donna has arrived and she is most likely their only chance to find a solution for preventing a catastrophe.

The lawyer slips her feet into the red shoes, leaving the room behind the two men with a smirk on her face.

She finds Cameron in the garage of the building. She's sitting in the back of an old, rusty pickup. It's rightful owner probably forgot about it about a million years ago, leaving the old car in that very place to rot until eternity. Before walking in, Lorena stands by the door for a few minutes, taking her time and watching every move of the young programmer. She's crying. You know the feeling when you're so stressed out that you either want to scream or just ugly cry?

"Can I disturb you?" The question might have been asked but she doesn't need to hear the answer for it. She simply walks in. Cameron is trying hard to rearrange her face, wiping her tears off with the frazzled sleeves of her shirt. She looks miserable.

"What do you want?" Being kind or polite is not something she learned. Her tacky demeanour makes the newly arrived companion suppress a grin.

"I would join you and sit down but I'm not properly dressed for that, I'm afraid." She comes with her trademark again. She doesn't even have to say anything insulting to score. Her tone is more than enough.

"Do you seriously think I give a shit about your fancy wardrobe?" Lorena gets exactly the reaction she was waiting for.

"Cameron, Cameron. You are too predictable. Devoid of surprises and life means absolutely nothing." She walks towards the old car, climbing up on the back without any difficulties, she takes her place next to her. Her high-waisted, black pencil skirt might survive this move - thanks to the long slit on the back - but the white, form-fitting blouse will definitely be eaten by rust and dirt.

"What the hell do you want?"

"Provide you company. Don't get me wrong, but as far I can see it, you're not the most popular person in here." Lorena can feel the vibes coming from the girl, she could write a whole thesis for her doctor's degree if she wanted to but she wants something completely different. Before saying another word, she gives Cameron the time to calm down. "You're craving for support, naturally. But you're craving it from the worst possible place. And I can guarantee that you won't get it." She speaks softly, the truth is enough to turn the knife in her heart.

"I don't need your fucking speech. I don't need it from any of you!" Cameron must learn how to control her emotions.

"Everything will be fine, it's not your fault. But you better get yourself together, otherwise, people might think you're unprofessional. And I'm sure you don't want that, do you?"

"What is this? Female solidarity?" Lorena laughs at the question, unconsciously making the lump in Cameron's throat grow bigger.

"Absolutely not. I just want to tell you not to let anybody crop your feathers down. It might turn you into something you never wanted to be."

"You must know about it. Walking around in these shoes all day must be really fucking hard."

"Let me give you an advice: never dress for the idiots around you. Look at me! I know exactly who I am. I don't wake up in the morning thinking about how hard should I try to give them a boner in order to get what I want. Do you wake up in the morning thinking about what you should do to make them take notice of your existence? Because I'm almost certain, you do." They're staring at each other for seconds. "It's time to figure out who the real Cameron Howe is."

"Your full-time job is to make people's life miserable." As much as the programmer wants to sound confident, she's failing like a little kid.

"My whole life is about pushing the limits."

"Yeah, other people's limits." Lorena leans closer to her

face.

"Every now and then, you need someone to knock you over that line. Is it such a bad thing? You might get stuck stomping around the same place forever."

Joe can barely believe his eyes when he finds the two women together, sitting in familiar nearness. After Cameron disappeared from her place, nobody had time to even care. If it wasn't enough that they needed a miracle to get the bios codes back, the journalist appeared in the basement and stuck with them until Donna was sure she can take on the role of a hero and save the day for them. His eyes sold him out before he could tell Joe that the article he was so eagerly campaigning for is going to be done. After all this, Joe is left with a mixture of victory and a defeat. He gave an order but Lorena disregarded it, again. Instead of doing what she was told, she's chatting with Cameron about who knows what. Considering the happenings of the last few weeks, she's got too many aces in her hands, and she's not afraid to play hard.

"We got the code. Cameron, go back to Gordon. Lorena, I need to have a word with you." Joe steps into the garage without a warning with his confidence being believable for the young girl, but he can't fool the lawyer.

The woman follows him outside. As soon as they're far enough from anyone to see, she gives him a menacing look.

"You need to have a word with me? Who are you? My father?"

"What are you doing?" He seems unreasonably irritated.

"What makes you think you can interrogate me like this?" Joe tightens his grip on her wrists but he needs to restrain himself from using too much pressure on her. Lorena stares down to their hands, Joe's palms are twice the size of hers. "You better let me go."

"Tell me what you're planning!" The thoughts in his head are putting him up for a rollercoaster ride. If he could just grab her somewhere else, he could make her beg. Her throat seems like a reasonably good choice.

"I can assure you, I have no idea what you're talking about. Aren't you a little paranoid lately? Anywhere you turn you see my evil plans unfolding against you." The lawyer's intention to free her wrist is anything but successful. "You're not half as entertaining as you'd wish to be. Why would I invest my energy in plotting against you?"

"Do you know where Kane is?"

"You should know. He's your guest after all." Lorena smiles with her eyes wide open.

"He's already gone. You left him alone and believe it or not, he found us in the basement and assisted through the whole time."

"Aren't you happy with the outcome?"

Joe tightens his grip even more. "Oh, I completely am. But I'm not happy with you ignoring my orders. If you let me down one more time, I might have to step up more forcibly."

* * *

><p>Before leaving the building for the night, Lorena makes a visit at Joe's office. She's not knocking. She simply walks inside. He's doing some alibi paperwork at his desk. His tie is gone, his shirt is unbuttoned on the top, sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He follows her with his eyes until she stops in front of the table.<p>

"I wanted to congratulate you. First, your face will be all over the pages, and people will absorb every single word that came out of your mouth while giving the interview. Second, your performance was magnificent out there. Gordon went home like a champion, and you managed to make an even bigger idiot out of Cameron. You almost bought me. Too bad I already knew how the trick was made. It always ruins the magic for me." Joe made up the whole show. She needed not more than five minutes to figure it out.

"Magic is not real. Illusion is."

"Big words from a juggler. Besides, you're a horrible liar."

He puts the pen down, leaning back in his chair. He's impressed. She figured him out, again.

"How can you tell if I'm lying?"

"It's easier than you'd think. Whenever you open your mouth, I know you do." Her expression is mysterious while stepping back to loudly slam the door, never taking her eyes off of the man on her way back to his desk. . "Touch or taste, Joe?"

Studying her face, he stands up in slow motion. Her ironic little smile is vibrating on her lips, she could be serious or she could be playing. She's unreadable.

"My choice, your game" He's standing in front of her, lifting his brows questioningly.

"It's not a game. More of an offer. You can take it or you can leave it." Her pupils are dilated, she doesn't even take the time to blink. She's not kidding.

Joe can't hide his grin. He's absolutely aware of how much of a game this is. They're both players, after all. He takes a step back from her to prove he's accepting the challenge.

"I might need to know what kind of rules apply for this offer of yours."

"Very simple rules. You either use your hands or your mouth. But you can only choose one. I will let you pick this time."

"And what if I break the rules?"

"Well, you lose."

"So this really is a game." He licks his lips with anticipation. She looks more delicious than a plate of strawberries.

"Why do you think you can win?" Joe strides closer to her.

"I have something you completely lack."

"What would that be?"

Lorena laughs. "Self-control."

Joe doesn't find it necessary to keep the distance anymore. He nods approvingly, showing both his hands to Lorena before putting them on the table. "Self-control. We shall see."

He bends down to the woman, biting her lower lip without further questions, making her open her mouth. Her lips are too soft to be true. Joe's tongue slips inside, the intensity of the kiss makes her moan into his mouth. She would wrap her legs around his waist but it's impossible, her tight skirt won't let her do it. Keeping her hands pressed onto the table while feeling his hard cock pressed against her lower abdomen is causing her physical pain. Joe traces her lips with the tip of his tongue before making his way to taste every single inch of her exposed skin. It's not much. But at this point, nothing would be enough. She tastes divine, better than he ever dared to imagine. His body presses into Lorena's, feeling her muscles clenching with desire as they're grinding on each other.

Joe whispers into her ears. "I would check it myself but I don't want to kick up the rules, so tell me how wet you are?" It takes most of her energy not to grab his hair and draw his head back the way she would want to. Her voice is hoarse.

"I wish you could feel it, it's out of this worldâ€¦"

"Turn around." The first order given by Joe that Lorena follows.

With their hands still pushed to the board, he makes her bend down to it. His erection is so massive, it almost rips through his clothes. The slit on the back of her skirt rides up with every move, and when it's finally high enough, they get the chance to feel each other even closer. They moan together with pleasure. Joe is alternating kisses with small bites on the nape of her neck, his breaths burning like fire.

They're both aching to be touched and grabbed, but both of them is waiting for the other one to make the move. And by that, lose the game.

"â€¦pleaseâ€¦" Lorena is close to begging him, her body can rarely take the teasing anymore. She's dripping wet with the need to feel him inside of her.

"What happened to your self-control?" His voice is hoarse just like the woman's, but his words instantly drag Lorena back to reality. Back to her mind. She straightens up, pushing Joe away with her body, still being aware of not to touch him with her hands at all, trying hard to find her breath again.

Leaning forward to him, she speaks without her usual smile. "Fuck you, Joe."

4. The Silent Observer

****The Silent Observer****

Lorena is followed by twitching lights and a police officer while walking quickly toward the heavy steel door, separating the spaces between freedom and destruction. As soon as they let her through, her eyes find the target instantly. She simply can't suppress an evil smile. Joe's back is facing her, not tall, not straight, not overflowed with vanity. It's like he's not even himself anymore.

The woman is approaching him slowly until she finally stands in front of the ruined perfection of Joe MacMillan. He doesn't even need to look up. He already heard the heels. First hasty, then slow and scornful. He would clench his fists if he could, but it's impossible right now. He's got barely enough energy to blink or breath. His mouth already tastes metallic with blood, but Lorena knows exactly how to worsen the taste.

"Well, well, well. So you're a human after all." She is fully without remorse. Not with their latest encounter, not with Joe questioning her ability to control.

"Where's Bosworth?" He's refusing to look at her face.

"Forget about him, I'm your savior on duty tonight. Officer, please unchain the wounded lion so I can take him back to the circus." She's prone to provocation and that never seems to stop working on Joe. He raises his chin frowningly. The point goes to Lorena, again.

It takes a couple breaths to restrain herself from the natural instinct, holding back from stroking the wounded face, tracing the bloody lips, swollen by heavy fists. In her mind, she has already stripped him naked, started her task to discover all of the bruises on his body. She'd bite it or grip it roughly whenever one would be found, asking him if that hurts. And when he'd moan with both pain and pleasure, she'd grab his swollen lips with her teeth and taste the sweetness of his blood.

The uniformed man uncuffs Joe and invites the lawyer a couple steps away to get done with the paperwork for his officer gives her a pen, pointing directly to the place where her name should go, bothering her deeply.

"I might want to know what I'm about to agree on if you don't mind. If I agree, I'll sign. Where did you put your finger? Oh, right here? I think I'll be able to relocate it. Until that, if you could just give me a minute."

She's more than curious about the story behind Joe's arrest. While reading the documents she's standing from one foot to the other, at one point she just laughs out hysterically. Leaving the offered pen on the counter, she fishes for her own one, signing her name on the dotted line before sliding the papers back to the other side of the desk along with a card. "I highly recommend you to contact Mr. MacMillan's lawyer first. Preferably with an excuse offer. Otherwise,

there will be problems."

Lorena walks back to Joe, casually sitting down next to him. The waves of irritation coming from him make her skin prickle. She's hoping for him to feel the same way.

"So how do you want this scene to be played? I mean, I could hold your hand and be by your side with tears in my eyes until we reach the exit on the other end of this corridor. Or I could just walk three steps ahead of you with a genuine smile on my face. Which one would you prefer, Joe?"

"Fuck you." The only acceptable way to react to her insult is to insult her back. Weak and trivial but who could blame him? Joe is clearly not in his best form, still he won't let the woman eat him alive only because he got dragged out of his own car, got beaten by two morons in uniforms before he got handcuffed to a bench for what, maybe two hours before they let him use the phone. Not to mention he called Bosworth to come and get him out. And what did he get? He got Lorena.

The woman is on top of the world once again. Last time she was so close to giving up and giving in. The way she almost begged. That scent that has gently fought itself into his mind the minute she stepped into Cardiff, the same scent that made him inhale her skin while she was bending over his table, hot with desire, radiating nothing but pure lust.

"Okay, okay. Don't take it to your heart. Maybe take it to your ego. But not to your heart if you happen to own one. I know there was bad blood between us but this time, I'll be nice to you. So here's the deal: I'm just going to sit right here and let you stroll out that door with the most confident walk you can carry out within these unfortunate circumstances. And only then will I follow you outside."

She drives him home in silence. There's no need to push the limits any further. The enemy has perished. Once she stops the car in front of Joe's building, he buries his face in his huge palms. He's anything but ready for his walk of shame. His ego is screaming inside of his chest.

"You look like shit."

"I feel like shit."

* * *

><p>The rain is pouring heavily, making Lorena arrive fifteen minutes late. The storm is bigger than she expected, but the fact that she actually made it alive to Cameron's place brings her a slight relief. Only a slight one, since the reason behind this get-together, is lost in a blur. She parks her car behind Joe's Porsche, even though he forgot to mention he'll be here as well.<p>

Lorena saved herself a headache this one time when she agreed to show up at the programmer's crib without excrescent arguments with Joe or lengthy lectures about how exactly knocking works and went back to work instead. She left him believing that he was rarely persuasive.

The woman takes a deep breath before getting out of her car. Not only out of annoyance but also because it smells simply wonderful outside. The only thing that makes her dislike for the unbearable weather lessen a bit is the scent. Fresh and balsamy, tickles her senses like a playful stroke. She walks toward the front door with long steps. Not properly dressed for a storm, she's still managing to avoid every single puddle with her pumps barely touching the ground. Her flaming red pencil skirt makes her visible even in the grayest, nastiest weather, the black blouse tightly hugging her figure.

She knocks on the door. Just like Joe should, whenever he rips the door open to her office instead. No answer. She looks at the bottle of wine she's holding in her left, knocking again.

"Open the door! I need a drink!" She's waiting. Exactly what she hates the most. Giving a last chance to get inside, her hand stops midway in the air as the entrance finally gets unlocked, Joe's appearing behind it. His shirt is on the way to be completely unbuttoned, his hair is bed perfect, his shoes are gone.

"You might want to thank me for being late, Joe." The sarcastic little smile plays on her lips, the one she spares exclusively for the same person every time.

"You might want to come in and get a drink." He steps away to let Lorena inside.

The house looks nicer than she would assume. It's light and spacious while it's rather hard to decide if someone is in the middle of moving in or moving out, according to the million boxes everywhere. There's no sight of Cameron, but it's not too hard figuring out where she might be.

"I hope I didn't kill the party. The sooner you spit out what you want, the sooner I can leave."

"You've just brought the party." His bruises are almost gone. On the outside, at least.

"This is wonderful. If you show me the kitchen and I can fetch myself some wine, I'll probably give you ten more minutes before I walk out of the same door you just let me in." Joe's face tells all about how impressed he is, smiling without saying a word, completely aware of how annoyed Lorena will be by his actions.

The weather makes her anxious, the humidity makes her feel dizzy. She marches into the kitchen, wondering about what could possibly indicate her stupid decision to replace New York with a city that perfectly mimics the conditions of Hell. She should have been a lot more suspicious.

In the cabinets, she finds nothing but Cameron's lack of need to make a home, which means there isn't a trace of wineglasses. Or any kind of glasses, really. Except for a green colored mug in the sink with a weird picture of some ridiculous haired punk band stained with some leftover coffee on the bottom. She's absolutely not about to drink that wonderful, golden wine from its bottle. Never did, never will. The sky rumbles like it's about to fall into tiny little pieces before it lights up in purple and yellow. Lorena rolls her eyes as

she's stepping closer to the sink for that horrible mug. She's whispering to herself. "Desperate needs call for desperate actions."

Joe is more than ready for Lorena to join their company. He worked really hard to make it happen, manipulating Cameron into it as hard as he could. He needed her help. More than ever before. Fortunately for him, she also needed something. Not only to be touched by Joe but lately she was obsessed with a new feature in their computer that seemed absolutely worthless, expensive, not to mention that the whole designer team was against it. Lorena liked him once again. He promised the new feature to be accepted but even after that, she wasn't easy to convince. Eventually, he did it anyways.

Lorena finds them in the bedroom. She's only moderately surprised. Cameron is sitting on the bed with her back facing the door, barely wearing anything but Joe's shirt. The man's standing right next to her, bending down to her neck, kissing it lightly. The lawyer takes a step back, lifting her eyebrows. Joe takes notice of her presence and as a reaction, he wraps Cameron's small frame into his arms, towering above her with his dominant height before throwing a cold-blooded look at the lawyer. A look right into her eyes then slowly turning his head toward the chair in front of the bed, signaling where he wants her to be.

This is the first time the man manages to catch Lorena by surprise. It really is a show exclusively for her. She is seriously considering to leave right now. But how could he possibly think that she can be scared away just like this. Whatever is happening, it is ridiculous. She walks up to the chair behind Cameron's back, sitting down on it, taking up her usual position. Crossing her legs, she takes a sip of the wine before putting it down next to her, giving Joe a questioning look.

Cameron sells him out in the first minute. She's ready for aggressive kisses and up against the wall, rough sex but instead, she's getting something completely different. Her confusion disappears within the third feathery light kiss Joe places on her bare breasts, and by the time he easily caresses his way down to her most aching parts, a single touch by the tip of his finger is enough to make her moan loudly. The air smells sweet with desire and bitter with revenge. All at the same time.

The lawyer is sitting perfectly still in her place. What's unfolding in front of her eyes could be true but just as much could be the lovechild of her imagination and the disturbing sensation of the weather. Cameron arches her back, the moan gets drowned into the loud roaring of the sky. She grabs Joe by the arms but she's powerless. His tongue is still alternating slow up and down moves with circles between her legs. When the first wave of her orgasm tries to break in, he revokes entirely, not letting her reach the point right away. He frees himself from the remaining clothes, dropping everything to the floor while Cameron gets onto the verge of crying. Even if there would be words to express how badly she wants to feel him inside of her, she's already forgotten how to speak. Joe kneels between her thighs, positioning himself, still refusing to go inside. The moment he starts teasing her with painfully slow moves, he's locking eyes with Lorena. The wine instantly turns into lava in her stomach. Whatever outcome he is hoping to get from her, she's definitely not willing to give him. He can't be stupid enough to think she might

join in. The simple thought is below her. She's smiling when she figures him out. Without breaking eye-contact, he slides inside the girl like a dream. She opens her mouth but bites on it instead, not being able to make a sound by the surprise.

Lorena won't let her breathing look anything but normal. Can not let it happen, even if the adrenaline in her blood rushes through her body so hastily, she can barely hear anything but the beating of her own heart. And that's already way too fast. Joe can't be fooled. They're communicating without words, their stare is getting so intense, it could catch on fire at any moment.

She can hear him inside of her head. "Touch!"

The woman bites her lower lip instead. Her thoughts exactly. This is how they sound in the voice of Joe. He's wandering inside of her mind. "Touch it!"

Her very own thoughts. "Touch yourself!"

To say she's dripping wet would be a serious understatement. She's blazing and she's about to explode by nothing but being eye fucked by him. This time, he might be the winner of their wicked little game.

Joe repositions Cameron so that she's laying on her stomach, her knees pulled up under her. Sweat sparkling on her whole body. He enters her again, making her grab the sheets so hard, her muscles clench. She screams with pleasure before starting to whisper his name like a sacred mantra, over and over again. Still keeping their eye-contact, Lorena vaguely shakes her head, signaling rather for herself other than to Joe. She has lost control over her breathing, practically panting now, gripping the armrest with both hands.

"Touch yourself and show me how much you wish you'd be under me right now!" Her mind has been taken over by his voice.

Joe's huge body moves faster and faster with every thrust, his glance tells her he's very close to reach the climax. Cameron begs him never to stop. Lorena leans forward in her seat, still grabbing whatever solid thing she can reach on the chair, her lips slightly parted, red and swollen with excitement.

He barely looks away from her the moment he's finally releasing himself. His whole body tenses up, muscles outlined, glowing with sweat. Phenomenal view. Lorena drops herself back in her seat, pressing against the chair with eyes closed. She can hear Cameron's raging orgasm.

Joe lays down on his back next to the girl, gasping for air. He's gigantic compared to her small body. Lorena needs to give herself a minute. She has to calm down and find a way to relax her tensed up muscles. She steps toward the bed and sits near the man's head. Again with the urge to touch him somewhere, stroke the sweaty hair out of his face, burn his skin with her palms. Her fingertips reaching for his lips, hearing his voice again in her head. "Touch!" The lawyer stops the movement so close, he can feel the heat radiating from her hand. He moans with anticipation.

"Desperate needs call for desperate actions." She whispers.

When Lorena closes the front door behind herself, the rain is nowhere to be found. It's only storming inside of her.

5. My Baby Shot Me Down

My Baby Shot Me Down

"The documents are fine. There's really nothing to argue about, the claims are the same, nothing more and nothing less. I'm sorry, John." Lorena holds out the file for the man. His hesitation is more than obvious. His secretary put that god forsaken envelope with the agreement to his divorce on his table with the rest of his mail, almost two weeks ago. At first, he could barely look at it. It was quickly shoved into the back of a drawer.

"Never sorry. Thank you for taking a look at it for me, I know it's not your main specialty but I highly appreciate your expertise."

John Bosworth's office is illuminated by gentle lights, it feels almost cozy. It's near midnight, there's rarely anything moving within the building. The only sound is coming from the Hoover as the cleaning staff starts their night shift.

"I'm sorry for leaving you like this. If I'd have the power to improve your situation, I'd do it. And I do hope you know this. But I've made my decision." Lorena drinks the last bit of brandy from her glass. She's holding eye contact with her soon to be ex-boss. He looks tired. Who wouldn't in his position? His whole empire is crumbling under him, right before it had the greatest chance to carry all the big expectations out.

"And I understand it. How much more time do we get from you?"

"I can promise you, at least, a couple more weeks, for sure. Right now it depends on many other things."

"So you have an offer, I suppose."

"I have a couple, but there's one I'm exceptionally curious about. We'll see what they have in store for me." The lawyer's getting up from her seat, fixing her dress, signaling for Bosworth that their conversation about her future is over. She's got nothing more to say.

"Thank you again, for the papers."

"No problem." Lorena walks toward the door with her usual long steps, her heels barely making a sound on the carpet.

"Have you ever been married?"

"Almost. Good night, John."

* * *

><p>Gordon is having a serious tantrum. He's perfectly mimicking the

behavior of a 5-year-old kid, who's got rejected in a candy shop. The way he's running out of the conference room is a joke. He can barely avoid crashing into Lorena on his way back to his office. She's following him with her eyes, not completely aware of what's just going on. Joe rushes after him, needlessly brushing his arm against her since there's plenty of room for him to fit, not even looking at the woman. Cameron catches the moment of the smallest physical contact between them while standing next to the coffee machine. Slamming her mug on the counter, she makes her way into Joe's office.<p>

The look on Simon Church's face is not exactly amusement. He gets up from his chair and walks out, stopping next to Lorena.

"What is this place?" He sounds extremely disappointed.

"Yesterday it was Cardiff Electrics. Today, it's a kindergarden."

"I see. Please tell Mr. MacMillan that I'm out. It was a mistake." The woman lights up a smile for the tall guy.

"Was it the first time?" She leaves Simon alone, it's perfectly clear that he will wait for Joe to return. The way he said his name was enough proof for that.

Lorena makes her way back to her room. She's got an ocean of work to do. Since Cardiff's state is getting real tragic, there's not a single minute to be wasted. The exact thing she promised Bosworth. Though she's not planning on sacrificing her career, she's going to continue doing her job the best she can. Until she's still there.

* * *

><p>Cameron can barely control herself. She's terrified and upset at the same time, she's waiting for Joe by his desk, but he's not showing up. What would she tell him if he'd finally appear? She's not sure about anything anymore. Since that happenedâ€ She couldn't calm down. The feeling inside her stomach every single time she catches a glimpse of the lawyer is getting unbearable. It's not the way she looks at Joe. He's almost invisible for her. Just like nothing happened. It's the way Joe looks at her, hungry for a single sign, a stolen gaze, anything. She knows she should wait for him but she can't. The urge to provoke something out of Lorena is washing over her every ten seconds. She's a mess. A mess, that Joe MacMillan made out of her.<p>

Cameron steps into the lawyer's office without a word, unsure of what she really wants. There's nothing but fire inside of her.

"Such a perfect student of Joe. A closed door is supposed to mean something." Hearing her saying that name gives the worst kind of creeps to the girl.

"Joe, ha?"

"I'm not wasting my time on you, don't even try to make me do that." Her tone is a weapon of destruction. She could recite a lullaby, it would still sound like a curse. She's not lying, she really doesn't care. There are mountains on her desk built out of papers.

Cameron got used to take orders from Joe more or less, but not from Lorena. She's wishing she could at least catch a look in her eyes, something that will tell her that the lawyer can lose her head or react without thinking. But there's not a trace of anything like that and it angers her more than it would be reasonable.

"Are you kidding? You won't even look at me?"

The way Lorena puts the pen down would scare anyone who's familiar with her away. She was tolerant. But she's getting pushed on the edge. "You could be good. No, you could be great! But you're an unprofessional, flippant, wacky child instead." Her words feel like snaps of a whip. "Do you think this is a fairytale, Cameron? Let me open your eyes: you're a whore. Nobody cares about the talent you own when you fucked your way to all the benefits you have. You're not too convincing. Get out of my office."

Cameron's blinking with disbelief. She's wounded. Deeply. Lorena speaks without aggression, but her words are blades.

"Who the fuck do you think you are?"

"I warned you, didn't I? Too bad I couldn't see you're a lost cause. You always were."

"Shut up, you bitch! I know what your problem is. You're fucking jealous! You think you're better than anyone, walking around like a fucking queen and it irritates you so much that there's something you can't get!"

Since Cameron's practically shouting in the lawyer's office, they gain some unwanted attention. If the girl was worried about people finding out about her latest actions, she's doing a bad service for herself. Joe appears in the background but won't interfere with the conversation. Cameron can't see him, he's behind her back. But she can't even see Lorena from the anger.

"Oh my god, you're not only dumb but you're also blind."

If there were just the slightest chance for the programmer to see the woman getting furious, she'd be a lot less desperate.

"Joe doesn't want you! He doesn't need you!"

"I won't lie, I'm very curious about what he said to you. What was the story? How could he possibly make you do what you did to yourself? And you know what? You're right. He's all yours to keep. If you think you can. Because he doesn't need you either."

"Fuck you!"

"I pity you, Cameron. I hope you'll learn. Please get out." She picks up her pen again and with Cameron silently crying from frustration, followed by the uncomprehending gazes of people, she continues her work. Like nothing happened. A skill, she was born with.

Joe finally makes a move, grabs Cameron by the arms and drags her out of the office, pushing her towards the elevator.

"Let's have some air."

Bosworth joins in when they finally reach the glass door, catching Joe's eyes. His question is loud and clear, addressed to the confused crowd.

"Don't you have some work to do?"

* * *

><p>The door almost falls out of its place when Joe rips it open and storms into the conference room. He finds Lorena sitting alone at the end of the long table, surrounded by millions of documents, they're just everywhere. She doesn't need to look up, there's only one person in the whole building she knows would step into somewhere with the same style. He doesn't move, he's just standing there with weaving chest. It can either mean he was running, or that he's more furious than the usual. Lorena grabs another piece of paper, looking up for a millisecond just to find that he is furious, indeed. His jaws tensed, eyes are fixed on the woman.<p>

"What the fuck, Lorena?"

"I missed you too, Joe." She signs something then grabs the next one.

"Don't! Just don't! I'm not in the mood for that." The pen stops in her hand before she can continue signing her name again.

"I'm not in the mood for you."

"What is going on?" He thrusts his fists into his pockets. She got caught, there's no doubt about that.

"You know what's going on."

"I want to hear it from you."

"Well, there are two things. One, I'm trying to work as you can see and two, I don't really care about what you want." She's not going to explain herself. Not now, not like this.

"So you give up."

"You're not planning on getting the hell out of here, are you?" The air is static, making the whole room feels like it's about to explode, leaving their skin crawl.

"Look at me." She signs again, reaches out for another document.

"Joe, youâ€|"

"I said, look at me!" His shout makes her jump a little in her seat. She finally does what he wants her to do, putting her palms on the table, inhaling deeply.

"It's really upsetting that I could never teach you how basic manners work, Joe. I'm getting more and more tired of your caveman style. Still, let me make a last attempt to explain something very important you might've never thought about, but definitely should have. I want

to draw your attention to the fact that you can't just stab a knife into someone's chest than try to heal it with a band-aid."

"You're running away? Handing me the victory?" Joe lifts his brows questioningly, his eyes flicker with a dark sparkle.

"What victory, you dick? I can't believe you think everything is about you. You're no one. Not special like you think you are. There are just blood and flesh and bones under your skin, not money and caviar!" Her usual calmness is rapidly fading away. Joe reaches her with only three gigantic steps, towering above her threateningly.

"Don't turn it around and talk about me! It's all about you, now! Tell me what is going on!"

"It's over, Joe, Cardiff is over! You know that, I know that, Bosworth knows that! It's you who keep on feeding people lies! What will you do when they figure out that your fantastic machine worths nothing? All of these people will have nothing! You won't drag me with you, that's what is going on."

"No. No, Lorena. This is bullshit. I thought you'll enjoy that." They're practically pushing into each other. The woman's raging inside by the way the irksome giant looks down at her. It takes serious concentration not to punch him in the face.

"Oh, I did. But I see how much it hurts you that I haven't brought it up once! Your exceptionally tasteful surpriseâ€¦ It took me to the conclusion that we might've taken this a little too far. And you're going cheap, Mr. MacMillan."

"I think it's just another part of your game. You're playing with me. Once again."

"Are you really not taking me seriously? I can only repeat myself, it's over. You are over, Joe. You have burned all the bridges behind you. But I can walk away."

"You're lying."

"Am I?" She's gifting him that sarcastic little smile. "I talked to you daddy last night, Joe. He really wants me at IBM. He offeredâ€¦ Let me just say, more than I was asking for. He said a few things about you as well, likeâ€¦"

Lorena can't finish the sentence. She gets smashed against the wall, Joe pushing her into it with his whole figure, pressing the air out of her lungs. He grabs her wrists, holding them above her head, far from gentle. She's about to suffocate but it's not because of the lack of oxygen. It's because of the way their bodies sizzle as he's grinding on her, roughly. He lets her take a breath, not loosening the grip on her wrists though he gently buries his face into the nape of her neck. That scent again. It lingers around her like an aura, sweet and spicy. Intoxicating. The scent and the silkiness of her skin make him rock hard in a heartbeat. She groans with excitement. His lips are brushing against her jaw, her chin. Both hyperventilating, Joe lets go of her hands, stroking his way down to her thighs, touching every inch he can. Lorena scratches his back gently, feeling the muscles under his shirt. She grabs his hair and

pulls his head back before he could kiss her. It turns him on even more, he wants to pick her up, hold her, feel her body wrapped around his. Joe grabs her ass impatiently but her skirt won't let it happen. Again. He looks at her, stunned.

"As much as I appreciate the spectacular view, it also takes a very good care of your virtue." Lorena's laugh takes him by surprise. He's trying to find the irony in it, but there's none. He's mesmerized by her face, looking up at him, her body shaking.

He's not joining her. He can't. Instead, he takes her face in his palms, causing her to stop laughing. His gaze makes her nervous. He leans closer to her, inhaling deeply like he's got something to say. Their eye contact brakes and Lorena gets hit by the realization of how much the situation got out of control. Every single move she can think of would be a mistake. Joe's hot breaths near her ear are more than unfamiliar.

"Don't leave me alone." Every whispered word feels like a slap in the face, for both of them. He couldn't keep it inside, he had to say it. He simply has to make her stay. She must.

Through the mist of her panic, she can feel a small, weak light emerging within her body. She grabs the man's chin, forcing him to look into her eyes again.

"What you need is not someone. It's something. The feeling of you bathing in your own glory. We're all alone, Joe." She walks out of the room with aching muscles and screaming lungs, leaving him behind, speechless, leaning against the wall. Taking all of his victory with her.

6. Mirror, Mirror On The Wall

****Mirror, mirror on the wall****

"Could you not talk to me, Joe?" Lorena is standing in front of the door, unable to leave her own office since the man is aggressively blocking the only exit. She's trapped. It's not too complicated to figure out what made him mad again, but his timing is lousy.

"You drop everything and go to New York?" The tone he's using is far from surprised. He's downright demanding for an explanation rather than a simple answer to the question.

"Look, I'm very positive about Cardiff's attendance at COMDEX. It's absolutely not my job to sell anything and yes, I'm going to New York. Which means that I have a plane to catch. So if you could just interrogate someone else, I'd really appreciate that." They clearly don't share the same problems. Joe couldn't care less about her plane, so he's making sure not to move by a single inch.

"Fine. Here's my suggestion: do __not __start it." His louring gaze is fixed on her, she's returning the look without a blink.

"I haven't even finished yet, Lorena. How could I start it?" They both know exactly how much his ego got wounded the last time he tried to make her stay. She easily ignored his words. The words he barely said to anyone before.

Somewhere behind his back Debbie clears her throat, signaling her need for the slightest attention, abruptly ending the staring contest between the two.

"Mr. MacMillan, they need you at the conference room. It's urgent."

* * *

><p>Lorena pushes herself through the half opened door of the elevator, rapidly making her way back to where she left from not more than three minutes before. She rushes to the glass entrance, imperiously dropping her bag and coat on the counter next to Joe. The sudden return of the lawyer is strange enough by itself, but the unusual tenseness of her steps makes it even more suspicious. She's breathing fire.<p>

"What happened? Have you changed your mind about coming to COMDEX?"

"Get out of the way, Joe." The woman refuses to stop and chat, simply by-passing him, her chest heaving with anger.

"What's wrong?" The man joins her without further hesitation, marching to the middle of the room by her side.

"I'm going to miss my flight, I'm afraid."

"Lorena, what happened?"

"I have zero idea about what happened, but that fifteen FBI agents I met at the lobby might be kind enough to inform us all. What did you do?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Listen, people, whoever did it, whatever it was, tell me right now!" Heads turning at her, uncomprehendingly, nobody understands what her words are about. All she gets is distracted murmur.

There isn't enough time to explain. The elevator beeps once again and as the door opens, Cardiff Electrics gets flooded by uniformed agents. At least, they know exactly who they're looking for.

* * *

><p>The lawyer turns off the engine in front of the closed garage door, honking before she gets out of the car, waiting for someone to let her in. She needs to calm down at least a bit, otherwise chances are, she will need to deduce the stress on a fairly different way. Like punching someone in the face. If it would be Joe MacMillan, she'd be just fine with that. She's raging.<p>

She was deceived, used and lied to. The charges against Cardiff made her want to laugh just to avoid crying. The whole story was surreal, it felt like an absurd dream. It couldn't be true. But the moment he caught Bosworth's eyes, she knew it was real. He robbed a damn bank.

The garage door starts to rise and when it's high enough for Lorena to walk in, she finds the trio of Joe, Gordon and Cameron inside. All eyes are on her as she gets herself an empty chair to sit down. Crossing her legs, her usual position. The skirt tightens on her thighs. She's completely in control over her tone.

"John is under arrest. We're hopeful, that the judge is going to approve of our request for a bail. I heard one side of the story. But since there must be another one, I'm giving you five minutes to tell me everything you know! You're in deep shit, so if I were you, I'd take this offer very seriously."

Joe is sitting with legs wide open, his sleeves rolled up, the top buttons of his shirt are undone. He knows how much of a time bomb the woman is. Though her performance is exceptionally convincing, she can explode at any minute.

"I want to know it just as much as you do, but I have nothing to say." Gordon's ability to handle a stressful situation is close to none. He's pale, a light tremble plays all over him, his hands are shaking. It's about the fourth time his glasses come off and go back on his head in less than two minutes.

"It was me, okay?" Cameron jumps onto her feet, pushing herself away from the table she was sitting on. The only person who's taken aback by her announcement is Gordon. He takes off his glasses one more time before burying his face into his palms, inhaling loudly.

"How surprising." Lorena awards the programmer with a provocative glance beside her usual menacing tone. She couldn't act like she's surprised even if she tried.

"The plan was to put everything back as soon as the Giant hits the market! We practically just borrowed that money! It should've never came out like this!" Cameron's effort to convince them about the legitimacy of her previous actions is fueled by nothing but desperation. It's too late already.

"Oh, this makes it totally different! The FBI will probably fully understand your concerns, they might even drop all charges against the company without further questions. Can you even hear yourself?"

"You're psychotic."

"Why didn't you come to me first?" Joe grabs the girl's wrist with a strong hand. He bends down to be on the same eye level with her. His touch feels electric. The contact lights her insides on fire but she's too scared to let her senses enjoy the sensation.

"It was Cardiff's money!"

"No, it wasn't, Cameron! And I'm finished arguing about it! How could you possibly agree to this nonsense? Were you out of your mind?" The lawyer gets up from her seat, walking straight up to the programmer.

"Bosworth came to me, he asked me to do it."

"Since when do you take orders from anybody? Were you the owner of

this idea, Joe? Were you involved? Because it smells just like you!" Lorena pushes her index finger into Joe's chest, her eyes are flaming with wrath.

"Do you think I would risk everything I was working for? I'm just as mad as you are!"

"I doubt that."

"Wait, what is going to happen to the PC? To us? All the energy I put into this!"

"Gordon, all of our careers are in jeopardy!"

"Your careers? I could go to jail!" The first waves of real panic are starting to wash over Cameron. She wasn't thinking about consequences. She wasn't pondering her chances at all. And here she is, worried like never before, without a promise of the smallest positive outcome.

"You may not go to jail, and this is the most astonishing part of this whole juncture. Bosworth is taking it all on his own." Lorena can hardly believe her own words, though every sound is true. She can't let herself lose her head, but she's getting closer and closer to it.

"What?"

"That's right, you heard me. And as much as I'm disgusted by this mess, I will do what he asked me to do. In other words to help you understand, I'm also saving your ass."

"Nobody will believe him, he doesn't even have the technical knowledge. You won't be able to pull this off!"

"They will believe what I allow them to believe. And he's already one step ahead us all."

The look on Cameron's face is unreadable. She doesn't know how to react anymore.

"It can't just end here! I'm not doing it again, I can't! We need to get the Giant back and take it to COMDEX. __You n__eed to get it back! What are you doing?" Gordon is practically screaming. Whatever is going on, it will most definitely put him back to the exact same spot where he used to be.

"I've heard enough. I'm done." Lorena can't tolerate the situation anymore, and the only way to end it is to walk out of it. The Giant was and will never be her concern. In fact, she doesn't give a damn about the PC at all.

"What do you mean '__you're done'__? You represent Cardiff, don't you? We need your help."

"You're not going to drag me into this. I have at least one good reason to stand up for Bosworth, but you? Listen to me very carefully, I can't save you from your own stupidity. You had your five minutes, I'm done."

* * *

><p>Joe is concerned about his father's treachery against him. Why wouldn't he be? His whole life is made up by the chain of events created by that ultimate betrayal. The one that made him unable to spend a minute with the man who should've been his main support, a role model. Yet, he's nothing but an enemy. The feeling of being home is not cozy. It's cold and uncomfortable despite the huge fireplace in front of him. Everything is strange, constantly reminding him of something he desperately keeps on trying to forget.<p>

He's not in New York to take care of family matters. What he needs is a simple answer to a simple question. Is IBM working on a portable PC or not? Is his father working on destroying his own son out of hate? Out of revenge? He won't leave until he knows the truth.

Once he can hear the front door slam, his stomach turns. Anger starts to fill his veins, making his fists clench.

He's not wasting any time. As soon as their eyes meet, he confronts his father right away, ignoring his surprise to find his only son sitting in his office. Unexpectedly finding him home after this long time.

Joe doesn't want to touch the delicate topics or talk about anything else. Especially not about his mother. Not about what his father did to her. How he demolished their family. He doesn't want to, yet he does. These thoughts were poisoning him for way too long now. The words are coming scantily at first, but once they find their way, they're floating from his mouth.

The door is wide open. The pointless knocking is not a request for acceptance, but more of a signal. A reminder that they are not alone. Joe ignores the sound but the suddenly appearing view causes him to bite the end of his sentence.

"Ms. Maze, please come in." Joe can hear his blood seething in his ears. His father doesn't seem to be bothered at all. He wasn't bothering telling him that he's got company.

Lorena appears in the door, looking equally surprised and purposeful while wearing a cocktail dress and a smile.

"This might not be a perfect time, Mr. MacMillan."

Joe is not getting late with a reaction, his pupils dilated by the sudden turn of events.

"Come on in, Lorena! Join us in all of our happiness." He looks at his father scornfully. "Leave us alone!"

Joe forces her to step back until she can't move anymore. She's stuck between the man and a desk behind her. He's using his physical ability to make her feel small and vulnerable again. He knows how much it irritates the lawyer, and that makes him doing it with even bigger pleasure.

"Are you trying to intimidate me?"

"I'm trying to figure out what the hell are you doing here. Maybe you

should help me out." He presses his palms on the table, invading both sides of Lorena, unconsciously reminding her instantly about what happened the last time he did the same thing. When he chose to taste instead of touch.

"This is my business meeting, Joe. The one you were whining about, remember?"

"Do you fuck with my father?" The question comes out of his mouth without a single blink, making her palms itchy. The urge inside of her to slap the man have never been stronger before.

"I have to warn you, if you start this conversation, you'll going to regret it."

"Lorena, do you?"

"What is your problem? Come on, you must have seen more pussies than an animal shelter. Why do you care?" She's examining his face. Either it's his usual provocation, or he's just about to take it to another level, it's hard to tell. Joe's struggle to use a normal, somewhat calm tone instead of yelling is more than visible. His Adam's apple keeps on moving up and down.

"Answer the question."

"I say it one more time, so you can process the information: this is my business meeting." She leans closer to his face, making sure he can not only hear the words she's saying, but also can read them on her lips.

"I'm going back to IBM." She knows. She heard every word he said to his father.

She wanted to bang her head into the wall right after his wish was accepted. It wasn't the reality of him crossing her own plan. What fired her up even more was the way he demanded for it. He gave out the orders without hesitation, and again, he got what he wanted.

"Apparently. I have to admit, Joe, you make me want to throw up. Your ignorance and the fact that you don't give a shit about anyone else but yourself is deeply sickening." Her usual way of speaking. Making sure the words are sharp like razorblades.

"And we are very much alike." He takes one more step toward Lorena, the last one. There isn't a single inch available between them anymore, her scent is already spreading through his veins.

"You're right. This is why we could never survive in the same environment. We're hyperpredators. We feed on each other. We might be on top of the food-chain, but we're not equals. We'll never be."

"I must chase you if you keep on running." The assumption puts a smile on her face, she doesn't even care about hiding it.

"Do you think I'm running away from you?"

"This is exactly what I think you do. So will you play your cards and ask me or not?"

A wicked, dark sparkle flickers in his eyes. He's mad. The piece he was hiding of himself is revealed. His most bothering secret is exposed and now he's standing naked in front of her, waiting for the woman to decide what she wants to do to him. He's aware of how irresponsible he was, letting her get into the winning position too many times. But this time, she's threatening to destroy him with all the weapons he gave in her hands. Joe's ready to see the sarcastic smirk appear on her face, but instead he gets nothing.

She hasn't found her right voice just yet. Not after all the things she heard. Not after being involved in all the pain. It's a whole new situation, and it makes her unsure of what the right reaction should be. The peek she had behind the man's mask was unexpected and terrifying. Even if he keeps on acting like a God, they both know the truth. She reaches out for him, taking his face into the palm of her hands.

"Look at me, Joe. I have nothing to ask you. Most of my questions are already answered. If you want to tell me more, I will listen. I want you to know, I'm sorry." If he's human indeed, he deserves to be treated like one. Just this one time.

The man closes his eyes by the feeling of her touch. He looks up again when the warmth of her hands is not present anymore.

"You don't have to fix me. I'm not broken."

"I think you are."

"How come you're such an expert, Lorena?"

"I have a good eye for that."

"Of course, you have. And you're obviously not broken at all." She looks away for a second, aware of him catching the hesitation.

"Your father wants the best for you, Joe. He made mistakes. Your mother made mistakes. But look what you've made out of yourself."

"You know nothing about me."

"I know a lot about the character you're playing. The truth is, you can't win all the time. Sometimes it has to hurt." She pushes him away, getting out of his reach.

"This is you running away." Joe sits down on the table, feeling the warmth her body left there. His expression is the same one that keeps on irritating the hell out of the lawyer. The sarcastic smirk plays on her face.

"You need to think about the lie you call your life, Joe. Good luck with that."

* * *

><p>Gordon became a man. Something he couldn't do for thirty something years, he did it in a single afternoon. He stole the Giant back, managed to get Cameron standing by his side and most

importantly, he made Joe MacMillan change his mind. The bastard was ready to turn his back on them, walk out of Cardiff and wash his hands before returning to IBM, like a king. For the first time in his life, Gordon knew what he had to do. There weren't any question or doubts. All he had was determination. And it worked like magic.<p>

Unfortunately, the magic starts to fade drastically. And tripping right in front of the finish line feels like a smack in the face. They are where they're supposed to be, ready for COMDEX. It only seems like COMDEX is not ready for them at all. The level of ignorance toward Joe at the reception is getting less and less tolerable for him. He's quickly running out of the patience he rarely ever had, none of the answers they provide are being good enough for him.

"What do you mean, Cardiff Electrics is not on your list anymore?"

"I'm sorry, sir. As I said, under the circumstances of the company, it had to be removed. This is all I can tell." The line keeps on getting longer behind Joe but it leaves him uninterested. He can't even remember the last time his request wasn't fulfilled right away.

Gordon is getting suspicious. It takes too long for Joe to get back. He decides to leave Donna and Cameron behind, sitting on their bags in the middle of the hotel's lobby, making his way to the reception.

"All right, fine. Get me a room."

"We don't have any available rooms, I'm afraid." The guy behind the counter is getting out of excuses. His face is red, sweating profusely, way too unprofessional for his job. Gordon has just joined in on the conversation, yet he already can't believe his own ears.

"Tell me, you're not serious. You can't even imagine what we had to do to get here!"

"I can put your names on an emergency list. If someone cancels their reservation, I will let you know."

"Thank you very much! See, Joe? This is how it should be done! How long could it take? Five minutes? Ten?"

"Well, not quite that fast, sir. There are 28 names before you."

Joe drags Gordon away from by the arms. Nobody seems to take his orders seriously anymore, and it angers him more than the fact that the Giant will possibly never see the sunlight.

"When I tell you to do something, you do it!" He can't help but acknowledge the lack of interest toward him.

He turns around to see a familiar phenomena at the same spot he just left a few seconds ago. She's wearing a burgundy summer dress with the inevitable heels. The same receptionist continues to sweat while running away just to return with a suited man, most likely the

manager of the hotel.

Only a few moments later, with her usual long steps, Lorena walks toward the neglected team of Cardiff, ignoring the presence of Joe fully.

"Here. Your keys." She keeps leaves them speechless. Gordon is somewhat skeptic about way too many things right now. The lawyer was clear when she refused to move a finger just to help them out with the PC, not even mentioning the rest.

"Hold on, isn't there a waiting list? With thirty names before us? How the hell did you do that? They're out of rooms. Completely."

"They are. We've been offered a suite, instead. Do you mind?" Donna shares a look with Cameron. The programmer doesn't seem overly happy to get Lorena around.

"A suite? Have you ever been here before?"

"You mean, in this particular hotel? Never in my life. Do you see that painting behind the reception? Now, that's a Picasso. And I know where did they get that from." Gordon is stunned. He was never a big fan of fine arts.

"Who are you?"

"I'm your lawyer." Joe gives her a frumpy look.

"And our fairy godmother, apparently."

"Irony won't get you a spot to sell the Giant, Joe. I will."

7. The Monster Under The Bed

****The monster under the bed****

"I can't believe they did this." Gordon keeps on walking up and down in the middle of the room. It's hard to figure out if he's talking about the possibility of his wife cheating on him, selling him out completely to someone else, or the fact that the exact copy of the Giant is overtaking the attention at COMDEX.

Lorena is following him with her eyes, getting dizzy. She's sitting on the couch, her legs curled up under her. She can't think of anything soothing to say, so she 's simply stretching out the glass of wine she's sipping on to Gordon, willing to share. He doesn't even notice the movement. He has way more miles to go, apparently.

Joe explodes into the suite, the expression on his face is not necessarily calm. He quickly reaches the woman's stretched out hand with his gigantic steps, taking the glass out of her hand, drinking up the wine without a word. Lorena must suppress a grin.

"We have a meeting." Gordon looks at him with terror in his eyes.

"What meeting can we have? You found a way to undo this?" His voice

is shaky, the man could really use a drink.

"Not you, Gordon. I don't need you to be around Hunt Whitmarsh. I need you to keep your family drama out of this but more than that, I need you to sit down and get yourself together. Lorena, we have a meeting." He walks to the door, indicating his need for her to hurry up. The woman raises her brows, the usual smile plays on her face.

"I thought I was your fairy grandmother. Not your inferior."

"Either you come, or I will take you." He looks sturdy enough to make the lawyer believe he means what he says.

"You really need to update your vocabulary with the word 'please'." She inhales sharply, getting up from her seat. She doesn't have to look for her shoes, Joe already has them in his hands.

"Am I properly dressed for a business brunch, boss?" Lorena grabs her belongings from the man while passing him. He shuts the door behind them, hungrily measuring her flimsy, white dress with his eyes. She's dressed for much more than a business brunch.

They take over the empty elevator.

"We meet him at the bar."

"Would you tell me what exactly you're planning on doing?"

"You should tell me." Joe steps in front of the woman, slightly closer than it would be reasonable. The lawyer is not backing away. Instead, taking him by surprise when she makes a small step forward. She's almost whispering.

"I don't want to ruin your mood if that's even possible, but if you were hoping for me to magically save the day, I won't. There's nothing in our hands against them."

"They stole our idea and now they're selling it. In front of us."

"I know it's not easy to understand, and believe it or not, it makes me just as outraged as you are, but they only committed crime if we can prove their theft. What we can't because it all happened in theory."

"Did you see it? It's the same! It looks the same, it knows the same, it proves everything."

"Joe, the law doesn't care about this kind of similarities. Without incriminating evidence it all means nothing. We will never be able to take this to court. Or maybe we will, sometime in the next four years."

"So you won't move a finger to help?" He wants to sound invidious, and he does. She takes a step back.

"I do hope you're just kidding me now. I don't move a finger?"

"What do you want me to say? Your entry was very convincing

yesterday."

And here they are again, the part where they usually end up tensed against each other, gasping for air; he's rock hard and she keeps on wearing that damn tight skirt. But she's wearing a light dress today. He could finally feel what he does to her.

"You're such an asshole." The conversation is over. She won't let Joe provoke her anymore.

The man is going straight against human logic every single time. He can't lose, that's for sure. But he can't take being helped out either. It gets clearer and clearer that he has no idea what he wants. Because "everything" is not an acceptable answer to a question that's been never asked. She ignores him for the rest of the elevator ride, standing on the other side of the glass, as far from him as possible, staring at the mass down under. They stop and the door opens. Acknowledging the fact that it's still not the ground floor, the lawyer turns back to the not so interesting view of the current floor through the glass walls.

"__Lori__!" A single word, nothing more. But it's enough to make her body flinch with panic. There's no need to check if Joe caught a sight of it or not, she can already feel his stare.

"Emma?" The door closes, making Lorena feel like a trapped bird. She looks at the short, grey-haired woman, a weak smile appearing on her face, eyes lighting up.

"Gosh, it's you indeed!" Lorena's expression is something new for Joe. He keeps himself out of the situation but makes sure not to miss a single detail of whatever is happening around him. The two women hug affectionately, they obviously have known each other for a while. Emma strokes the lawyer's hair like a mother would for her child.

"How come we meet here? Are you alone?" Lorena speaks without the edge in her voice, she sounds almost unrecognizable. The older woman rolls her eyes while smiling, keeps on holding hands.

"Ah, you know Patrick and his golf. I wonder where he'd be if it wasn't our anniversary."

"Of course, it is, congratulations! How many?"

"Thirty-three, love. But look at you! You're still beautiful, sweetheart. On vacation?"

"No, no. I'm working." It's sounds more like an apology.

"I keep on hearing about your achievements in New York. You might have left the city, but your name is all over it. Luke would be so proud of you. And so are we!"

"Yes..." Joe's gaze is all over her. It's not their average game anymore, and she can feel her muscles go weak. The elevator can't stop soon enough.

"Take care, darling. You know where to find me."

"I will. And happy anniversary!"

"As soon as I can find my husband."

They rush out of the glass cage, Lorena keeps her eyes on the grey-haired woman as she walks toward the reception. She can't let Joe speak first.

"Find Whitmarsh. I'll join you in a minute." She makes her way to the hotel entrance without further explanations.

* * *

><p>They can hear the shouting from the other end of the hallway, and it makes them drastically quicken their steps. Joe and Lorena find the door wide open.<p>

Cameron kneels beside the PC with despair in her eyes.

"Where is it?" She keeps on repeating the same question though she's not the only one who doesn't know what's going on. Joe walks inside first, a hasty look on the monitor is enough for him to know what the programmer's about.

"Gordon?" He's standing by the window, watching the girl's agony. He looks far from happy.

"I took it out. Now it's better than it was. Better than the other one. I had to do it. You know I had to do it."

"You took out everything that made it unique! Joe!" Cameron looks at him, hoping for support. Lorena is being exceptionally curious about what his next move is going to be. It could go two completely different ways depending on his reaction. He can choose to be a human or he can choose to be his usual self, a dick.

"Cameron, we need to sell the Giant." He doesn't get a chance to continue. The girl dashes away. "Gordon, take a shower and dress up. We have to introduce the PC in 30 minutes."

* * *

><p>The man knows how to talk, this must be given to him. Other than that, he's got a poor judgment on almost everything. He's getting ready for the guests' arrival. If there's one thing for sure: there will be plenty of them. Everybody wants to see Cardiff's creation, some of them definitely wants a part of it as well. He's half dressed when finding Lorena in a white, fluffy bathrobe. Her hair is wet, she's on her way to the bedroom.<p>

She's not complying, again.

"I hope you'll be ready very soon." The man keeps his look on her while buttoning up his sleeves.

"Ready for what, Joe? It's your show, you better work it. I'm just a part of the audience."

"I don't like your attitude toward tonight. You know how important this is."

"I don't like you giving me orders and telling me what to do. Still, I keep my attitude and you can continue being a jerk without me witnessing it." Joe grabs the door before she could close it. He needs to make her attend the party. She has to be there. ___With him.___

"Lorena, ___please___." She's examining his face for a while before disappearing into her room.

Gordon is with Donna. Whatever happened between them before, they look just fine together. Either they had time to talk about their situation already or they're only planning to, it doesn't really matter. Lorena pushes through the crowd, listening to Joe's pumped up presentation, a guy hands her a glass of champagne. The people are reacting to everything they hear, visibly enjoying the show. Of course they do, they don't know about anything that happened behind the curtains until finally, this moment has arrived.

The lawyer was sure about having some surprise guest over for the night. She exchanges a look with Donna when the girls from the porn convention appear. As the music starts, the mood goes from good to great. She can feel Joe's glance from across the room. Catching his eyes, she pushes herself away from the counter, raises the glass at him, giving him a chance to take a good look. Lorena is wearing an eye-popping coral dress, form fitting, ending just above her knees. As she turns around, looking back over her shoulder, the spectacle of her bare back is making the expected impact on the man. They don't need to talk. Their communication is much more successful with their eyes only. Somebody grabs her by the waist, taking her to dance. It's not Joe. And she's not resisting.

He can't help but notice the unsettling absence of the coral dress. The color made it more than easy to keep an eye on the wearer until somehow, it got out of sight and lost somewhere in the crowd, but Joe hasn't got the time to think about its whereabouts just now. He needs to sell the Giant. And he couldn't ask for better conditions to do that. After all of the difficulties and setbacks, the destiny of the PC might be sealed by the morning. It's up to him. This is the moment he was waiting for ever since he walked into the idealess and backward office of Cardiff Electrics and made a whole company bow down to his will, until he resurrected it from the dust it was laying in. He's using the right type of words, he knows the answers to every question and he can convince anyone of how much their lives would be empty without their own Giant. The attention, the way they not only drinking the champagne but his words, it all should make him feel on top of the world. It should, but does it? The only question he's refusing to face with. He takes a look around from his seat every now and then, annoyed by his own need to catch a glimpse at a certain woman.

As time passes by and the crowd starts to fade, there's only one handshake left to make it official. Guilt races with excitement inside Gordon's chest. He had the right reasons to do what he had to do, even if he needs to remind himself about it over and over again. Without the modifications, the Giant would've never stood a chance. He couldn't understand Cameron's devotion toward the idea of a computer with a personality. It's a machine. Its purpose was never to offer company. He had to destroy someone to get to his own dreams. Definitely something he's not used to, must be the legacy of Joe

MacMillan who never had any problems with walking over anyone who happened to stand in his way without the slightest trace of remorse. Still, the girl's face after she found out what Gordon did to her work burned into his mind, turning his stomach. But the feeling of success makes it so much easier to bear.

Joe is more than frustrated. Of course he is, since what he needed was Lorena to be around him when he finally reaches the ultimate goal, the one that brought them to COMDEX after all. He was aching to see her face as he becomes the victor once again. But what did she do? She denied him and disappeared without a word. The thought of her being with someone else makes him furious. He walks around the suite with tensed muscles, opening and closing doors, looking for her. The less he can find her, the more his rage grows. It's profusely after midnight and he's running out of places to check.

He drops himself onto the bed in the last bedroom. If only he could be happy about the Giant, everything would be different. He takes his jacket off and throws it away, that's when he picks up on the sound that's seeping through the closed bathroom door.

Joe tears it open without hesitation, there's nothing more motivating than the fire of wrath that's burning inside of his lungs.

And there she is. Sitting in the empty tub, her coral dress perfectly in place. The bottle stops in her hands by the unexpected visitor. She barely looks up before going back to lavishly refilling the glass.

"Damn it, Joe! You really don't know what knocking is." She puts the empty bottle down on the marble floor, right next to her shoes. Her calmness makes his blood boil.

"I don't remember if I told you to get drunk in this fucking bathroom." He makes sure to close the door loudly, restraining himself from shouting at her.

"I don't remember the last time I was giving a shit about what you told me. Besides, I wish I'd be drunk. But the thing is, I'm not."

"The Giant hits the market in 3 months." He keeps the second part of the sentence to himself. __"But you'd know it if you would've been close to me."__

"Phenomenal. I'd offer you a drink to celebrate it but there's not enough for both of us, I'm afraid. So why don't you go and drink somewhere else? Or just simply walk out and leave me alone."

Her performance is immaculate. It would be completely believable for anyone. Anyone, except for Joe. Like a real beast, he can smell the wounded prey from miles. The thought of getting on top of her after what happened in New York fuels both his need for revenge and his insane anger. He's looking for the softest spot to hit. He owes her one, that's for sure and considering the circumstances, it's his turn to drive her to the wall.

"Who's Luke?" The woman's reaction is priceless, her gaze is nothing but pure disgust. They're staring at each other.

"Luke..." The way she says the name feels like blades cutting in his stomach. "Do you know when was the last time I heard this name? Seven years ago." She takes a big gulp of the champagne but has nothing else to say. Joe needs to know. If he must, he will provoke the answer out of her, but he's refusing to have another sleepless night because of a faceless fear. Jealousy is not something he ever had to deal with before.

"Did he break your little heart? I'd be surprised to hear that you've ever had one."

"I wonder what's the reason for you not going after Cameron instead of questioning me, because the way I see it, you cold-bloodedly massacred the goose that's laying the golden eggs. Congratulations for that, by the way. It was the most idiotic thing you could ever do. You destroyed yourself."

"This is your method, Lorena. This is how you do it all the time. You try to turn things around, talking about me. I won't let you lead me into your game. This is about you now. What happened? Did he cheat on you? No. You're not the type to be cheated." He rolls his sleeves up, pressing his back against the door.

"I'm impressed. You know me so well." Her sarcastic tone never seems to stop working on the man.

"He left you." She smiles with her lips. But her eyes are gloomy.

"Yeah. He left me. Without ever saying a word."

"But you're a big girl, aren't you?"

"You know, Joe, to my honest disappointment, you really resemble him in a way. You can actually make me __feel__. I loved __him__. And I hate __you__."

"Maybe instead of running away from me, you should just run back to him, then." Lorena is staring at him without a blink.

"He's dead, Joe. Luke is dead. It was a car accident, two weeks before the wedding. I was on my way back home from Paris with my dress. I know, I'm such a snob. My parents waited for me at the airport. They told me he was gone. You met his mother. Here's my story. Are we even now?" The champagne turns bitter in her mouth, but she doesn't care about it. She grabs the next bottle to refill again. "Good people don't last. And this is exactly why you and I are going to live forever. Cheers!" She empties her glass with a single move, refilling it again.

"Lorena, enough." Joe is watching her. He can't move, he needs time to process what he had just heard. The glass breaks on the door, right next to his head.

"Don't you tell me when it's enough! It's not enough! It's been seven years and I couldn't even make myself visit his grave! What kind of a monster am I?"

She's crying soundlessly, but her tears worth a million words. She's hiding her face behind her hands. She can't see Joe when he steps

next to her, she can only feel the careful touch of his hand.

He carries her out of the bathroom in his arms, the lump in his throat keeps on growing with every step. After placing the woman on the bed, he lays beside her, making her body disappear in his embrace.

Their breathing sync up, making Lorena to slowly calm down. Unable to speak, she hesitantly places her hand on his back, buries her face into the curve of his neck. The touch of her lips on the delicate skin feels like an electric shock for both of them. Joe puts a gentle kiss on her forehead. Lorena falls asleep without the intensity of his hug ever lessening around her.

"You're not a monster. You can't bury what you haven't mourned."

8. Ready Or Not

****Ready or Not ****

Lorena storms inside of the apartment without feeling the need to wait for an actual invitation. The heels clicking on the floor as she makes her way into the living room, her envelope bag lands on the desk with a rather powerful momentum. She's not sitting down, she's too stressed for that. Standing in front of the glass wall, she's observing the night lights of Dallas. One thing is for sure: the view is spectacular.

Joe wasn't in a particularly chatty mood during the whole evening. As a matter of fact, it took more than enough energy to keep himself from hammering the Giant right into the ground. From a visionary genius, he became a side note to Gordon Clark's thank you speech, making his skin crawl with disgust. His ego was in a serious agony. What else could he do? He left without a word.

Lorena was the last person on his list to expect for a visit after this nightmare of an event. Yet, she's here. Joe follows her back inside, stunned by the fact of how good the woman looks inside of his realm. He leans against the wall with his back, arms crossed tightly over his chest, measuring the lawyer with his eyes. Inch by inch. He doesn't want to be the one to break the silence though he's extremely curious about the reason behind her sudden appearance.

"Care to tell me what exactly your problem is, Joe?" The edge in her tone is the usual, it's amazing how in control she can be.

"Which one of my problems interest you the most?" She turns around to face him, her smile is almost threatening. But at least warning.

"I don't know. How about the one that makes me the messenger between Gordon and you?" He stays still, refusing to react, making sure she gets irritated by his behavior.

Lorena turns back to the sleeping city instead. She's aware of the man's tricks and she's in the mood to outsmart them. She's not willing to lose her temper and give him half the chance to be proud of himself.

"Listen to me very carefully. I know you think you can do anything you want, to whoever you want and whenever you want it. Let's not talk about how wrong you are in the first place. Instead, let's talk about how much it's finally time for you to realize that whatever your actions are, you can't turn your back to the consequences." The woman gives him a look over her shoulder. As much as he's trying to look casual, his tensed up muscles sell him out with the speed of sound.

"If you came here to school me about consequences, you better join the class."

"I came here to tell you, I'm done with your shit." Her red dress waving around her body like fire as they're staring at each other. The exact thought he had when he first saw her hours ago at that godforsaken ball. She's just like a flame.

"You know you need me. Just like I need you." The words come out of his mouth in a tone that makes them more of a provocation rather than a confession, causing Lorena to clench her fists before grabbing the first thing she finds on his desk and throw it away. Preferably to his head.

"Don't be ridiculous. What you need is common sense. And what I need is to stay away from you."

"So you did it on purpose."

"How could I tell? Maybe if you'd be a bit more specific." A little smirk appears on the man's face as he continues watching her.

"Aren't you a little too smart to successfully act like an idiot?"

"Why don't you ask your question instead of talking round?" Of course, she's smart. The way Joe throws his hands in the pocket of his trousers makes her feel almost satisfied. The last one to be pushed to the edge will win the conversation.

"That morning you left me alone. I want to know why." She has to admit, Joe is catching her by surprise. Not so much by the question itself, but by the dark glance that's still pierced into hers.

_Yes, she did leave him alone. It was for her own good. No matter how much she regretted sharing her past with the man, it was already too late. All through the night, she had dreams about clinging to that dress on her way home like her life depended on it. She was looking out the window from the backseat of her father's car until the road and the whole world disappeared behind her tears, gripping the white gown until she couldn't feel her fingers anymore. She was suffocating in her sleep. She woke up to be wrapped around in Joe's body heat, his breathing slow and balanced. She hugged him even more tightly while he was asleep, trying to avoid crying. The most simple human contact. Touch. She was awake for the rest of the night. Her brain couldn't stop, it kept on showing her images of pain and passion, screaming for rest on the inside. As the first rays of sunshine started to overtake the room, she knew she had to get away. The need to wake him up with a kiss on his neck became intolerable. She gently unwrapped herself from the man's embrace but couldn't leave the room.

She was standing there with the door knob in her hand, unable to move for minutes, before walking back to the bed. She sat down on the edge, carefully took his face in her hands and gave Joe the slightest little kiss on his forehead. Lorena made sure not to wake him up. And most importantly, not to let him know. She packed her bags and escaped from the suite and from Las Vegas. From Joe MacMillan. From herself._

"I don't think I have anything to apologize for. You can't artificially recreate intimacy where there's none." Her words are cutting into the man's flesh. His fury is obvious. His Adam's apple is sliding up and down like every time he's about to lose his mind.

"Really? And who's fault is that? Luke's? Or my father's?" Joe's hungry for her reaction. He needs to throw her out of the winning position and if he must get hurt, he wants to make sure she gets the same.

"This is the first and also the last time I'm going to ask you not to mention that name ever again. I do not want to hear it coming from your mouth." An uninitiated ear could probably never hear the small tremble in her voice. Joe does though he's not sure if it's triggered by pain or anger. "And for the other one, are you actually this desperate to find out if I laid your daddy just to make you feel miserable?" The woman mimics his last position, putting her back to the glass wall, her arms crossed on her chest.

"Is that how I made you feel?" His memories of what happened during the storm are vivid like it happened a minute ago. The lightning in his spine reminds him of how much he wanted to be touched by her. How she almost did.

"No. You made me angry."

"I know how you operate, Lorena. I know what you do. You get pleasure from resisting me, refusing to comply any of my requests. You offer me a taste before taking it all away again." He steps away from the wall, rolling his sleeves up, giving himself time to somewhat calm down before he continues staring back at her. "If you think I have the patience for this kind of game, I need to warn you, I don't."

"Thanks for the memo, I'll keep it in mind." She grabs her bag from the table, taking two of her usual long steps toward the door before changing her mind and throwing the bag back where it was, walking up to her previous spot. The lawyer is enraged but she knows she can't run away. Not this time. At least not until she's finished.

"You know what's the most disturbing thing about you? People can't do you good. Nothing is good enough for you!"

"It's not true." Her laugh is pure irony.

"Oh, it is true. You have no idea what you want from your life, you have no idea who the hell you really are! You want to look like a human, but you get terrified once they think you're not a monster! Grow up, Joe! Stop walking around like a huffy kid!" She might be pissed off, unable to keep her tone under control but she's not the only one.

Joe walks up to the woman, sweeping off whatever is on the table between them with a single move before leaning on it. He's not too far from shouting.

"The last thing I need is a lecture from you! Don't be a hypocrite, Lorena, the same exact things suit you perfectly! I've heard this speech before and I'm getting tired of it. It might be time to figure out something else." She can hardly believe her ears.

"Something else? Here it is, you dick! I don't need you at all! But I want you." Joe straightens up, studying the woman's face. She's not even blinking.

"Then why don't you have me?" He's waiting for a reply but not surprised when he gets none.

He steps in front of Lorena, pushing her up against the nearest flat surface. He bends down to her neck, smelling that indescribable scent, brushing his lips against her skin, speaking softly into her ear.

"I want you to have me."

She makes him look into her eyes, the sarcastic little smile is on her face. "If I wouldn't know you, I might think you beg."

"I never do that." Joe's caging the woman in with his arms, his palms resting on the walls.

"Sounds like a fair challenge."

"A fair challenge, indeedâ€¦" He draws a line from her collarbone to her lower lip with the tip of his tongue, enjoying the little sounds she makes.

The anticipation to taste each other is stronger than ever before. It only happened once and now the hunger is unbearable. She moans into his mouth as he kisses her deeply, holding her face in his hands, alternating fast and slow motions with his tongue. She can feel his rock hard shaft pressing against her, turning her on even more. Both gasping for air from their kiss, Lorena takes his hand, easily licking his index and middle finger with enjoyment.

"Do you want to know how you make me feel, Joe?" He bites his lips to avoid begging her right away, though this time she's not playing. He slightly tucks up the flaming red, flimsy dress, barely touching her through the dainty fabric of her lingerie with the edge of his thumb. She wraps a leg around him, holding onto his shirt.

Joe's face is glowing with excitement as he slips her panties to the side, the heat illuminating from her core. He gives her a kiss while finally sliding his fingers inside. Her moistness makes him groan. She's dripping wet, only for him.

"It really is out of this world. You feel so good." He moves his hand extra slowly, relishing in every moment of his sensual torture. The way she closes her eyes with pleasure, how her hips move around his fingers. The sigh that leaves her mouth. The effort to keep herself from supplicating for more. He can barely decide what to do next.

Where to touch, where to kiss, where to bite. He can't resist the urge to treat himself. His fingers taste just like her, sweet and fruity like a bite from summer itself.

"We're definitely not sharing the same idea about fair play." Her voice is hoarse. "I expected nothing else from you."

"What could I say? I'm not a devoted promoter of it. Especially not with a trickster like you."

"Ah, of course. I almost forgot how smart you think you are!" The deep thrust of his fingers makes her swallow the second half of the sentence, roughly grabbing the man's shoulders as the speed of his move intensifies.

"Am I not?" He asks between feathery light kisses on her neck. He can feel the gentle scratch on his back through his shirt. The sounds she makes are divine, just like the touch of her body around him.

"I don't!" She's among sighs and moans while the pressure grows inside.

"Don't what?"

"Don't stop."

He smiles into her skin. "I won't."

There's already no turning back for her. Shiny, colorful circles are dancing around behind her closed eyes, deafened by her own heartbeats. The cold touch of glass against her back counteracts the fire coming from Joe. Her nails dig deeper into his skin as her muscles start to give up the fight against the growing waves of climax.

Joe is unconsciously taking over the tempo of Lorena's breathing, watching her with wide eyes, lips slightly parted with rapture. It only takes a little more to push her over the edge and feel her tightening around his fingers, her body shaking with pleasure. The way she's staring into his eyes makes him want to explode right away. They're still short of breath when she grabs his lips with her teeth, biting on it, making him choke on a kiss with her. They're panting like they've just finished running the marathon.

"I have a chair if you feel like you need to sit down for a minute." He licks his fingers clean, still pushing his body against her.

"Keep the chair for yourself. You're barely breathing." Joe shivers as she grabs his most sensitive part, holding it tightly, the little smirk playing on her face. She can't wait to feel him without all the unwanted layers of clothing between them, but she wants to take him to the limit. Lorena lets go of him. The man exhales through his nose, he's undoubtedly frustrated. The grimace on his face promises hardly anything good.

"I warned you not to toy with me, Lorena!" She pushes him away, enjoying how appetizing he looks as his desire mixes up with anger.

"Joe! I said, sit down. You're barely breathing." He's examining her face, wondering if she's kidding or not.

She doesn't move, her order was clean and simple. Joe grabs the chair from his desk, turning it around to face the woman. He takes the seat, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, impatiently brushing the hair out of his face with his fingers.

"Good." She takes off her heels, showing them to the man before carefully placing the shoes next to him. "Before you'd suspect me of running away. I am not leaving without these, ever. God, you should see your own expression."

Lorena kneels between his legs, kissing him deeply. She can't keep her hands off of him any longer. He sinks his teeth into her lips as an instant reaction to the tight grip around his shaft. She's taking it out quickly, there's no more time to waste. She's waited enough already. Weeks and months. All night and day, patiently. Unlike him. The tiniest touch of her lips makes him groan with delight. Sitting back in the chair, he touches her hands around his rigid cock, the view itself keeps on giving him chills. Her tongue goes on a mission to explore him. If he could speak, he would tell her what he actually thinks about her kind of fair play. But he can't. She knows exactly what she's doing to him. Slowly, methodically driving him crazy. The way her mouth feels like around him, sliding up and down leisurely.

"You're a trickster, Lorena." He sounds slightly less convincing than usually, putting a wide grin on the woman's face.

"You look a little too pleased to complain, Mr. MacMillan. Plus you started the whole thing. Why should I be nice when you play it all dirty?"

"Remind me not to start reasoning with a lawyer. They're all unendurable."

"So are the bitchy salesmen with a tendency to compensate their lack of trust with a superiority complex."

"Kiss me."

He bends down close to Lorena's face, her grasp is still steady around him. The electric sensation as their skin touch is more than thrilling, and far from enough. Joe rises from his seat, making Lorena go with him. He drops the white dress shirt on the chair while stepping behind her, unzipping the scarlet dress, his lips never stop stroking the back of her neck. Their moan echoes from the walls as his chest pushes against her bare back. They're grinding on each other with such intensity that their muscles start to clench. He can't restrain himself from sliding his hand between her legs, hungry for the feeling of her panties drenched with desire. He needs all that's left of his self-control not to rip it right off as his fingers find their way inside of her again.

Lorena turns around, grabbing his belt aggressively, indicating for Joe to finally get rid of everything that's blocking the contact. Her nipples are hard with excitement. Joe leans down to kiss them. Left, right, start all over, carefully biting on them. Her hands are either

stroking or gripping on his hair as a reaction, depending on which move he's making. She takes a step back, sitting on the edge of the desk, never breaking eye contact while watching the man leaving his pants on the floor. She can hardly believe how delicious he looks as he's standing there in front of her, naked, completely turned on. Pupils dilated, his skin vapors pure lust. The touch makes her shiver as the last bit of fabric between them disappears.

"You're so amazingly beautiful." He makes his way down from her lips with small nibbles varying with kisses until reaching her core, listening to her shouting his name with ecstasy, leaning onto his shoulders, marking them with her nails. His sighs are burning the delicate skin on her inner thighs. Joe makes her wait until she's on the verge of crying. Until she drops her head back, craving his mouth more than she can bear. Her voice quivers.

"I know what you want and I will not beg you." But if you keep on doing this, I swear I will kill you." The man doesn't answer. There's no need, she can feel him shamelessly grinning against her skin.

He gives in. It's impossible not to taste her, and she's more than ready for him. She's burning hot. Lorena moans by the touch of his tongue.

"oh my god, Joe." She's arching her back with pleasure. The compulsion to feel him inside of her grows beyond imagination.

He stops abruptly, lifting her up from the table without a warning. They're staring at each other, talking with their eyes only. The single form of communication they can really use and understand.

Joe reaches the bedroom with six of his gigantic steps, placing Lorena on the bed. All he can hear besides his own blood rushing in his ears is Lorena. The way she's panting with lust. Kneeling between her legs, he can't retain himself from teasing her, knowing exactly how it will affect her. The same thing it does to him. He slides inside of her with a painfully slow motion, luxuriating in every move she makes. He gives her time to adjust to his size, the exquisite feeling of her tight body around him leaves the man breathless. Lorena locks her legs around his waist, demanding for more of him, but he still doesn't move. It's all part of his torture. He leans forward, entwining his fingers with Lorena's, outlining her lips with his own mouth.

The moment he finally starts moving she bites on his Adam's apple. His extent fills her completely, making the woman purr like a cat. Joe increases the speed, groaning heavily with every thrust. Lorena frees her hands, wrapping them around him, gripping his skin wherever she can, moaning into his neck. The deeper he goes, the deeper her nails sink into his skin.

She changes the position with a skillful move, getting on top of Joe. His expression is both surprised and impressed as he's admiring the vision of the lawyer sitting on top of him, the way her body looks on his, how her skin feels against his. A very dangerous territory. The man keeps on watching her while she rides, driving him insane with the way her hips drawing circles again and again. He must touch her. His thumb is pressed on the perfect spot, sending her even closer to the limit. He knows he won't take much longer either. Joe turns their

position around once again, back to how they started. He pushes inside of her right away, grabbing her waist tightly with one hand, continuing to stimulate her with the other. She's whimpering with enjoyment, gripping his wrist, signaling she wants more. His thrusts are intense and fast.

"Open your eyes and look at me!" Though her voice is soft, the command is clear.

Joe's glare is completely on Lorena, the spectacle is flawless, better than he ever dared to imagine. Her walls tightening around him, locking him inside so intensely that the electric shock in his spine comes almost unexpectedly. Pulsating, throbbing inside of her.

They're laying on each other, breathing hard. Joe fondles her side, entwining their fingers when he finds her hand. The whole room is vibrating. He swallows the words that want to fight their way out of his mouth. They're not many. Only three. But he's unsure of their meaning just yet.

Instead of Lorena's warm body curled up against him, there's nothing but cold beside Joe when he wakes up. She disappeared and all that's left is the cold. Again.

Just like at COMDEX. He woke up to Cameron's weird appearance that morning, talking about a rock and California. About something he couldn't even conceit. After all, that happened the night before, Lorena left him without a word. He couldn't care less about Cameron or anything else. He was raging. The wound on his ego was so painful, all he wanted was to destroy everything. The whole galaxy if he could. And from that moment, his perfect world started to crumble down around him. Cameron walked out of Cardiff, Lorena didn't show up for weeks. And when she finally did, she kept avoiding him, looking through him. He was left with nobody else but Gordon. Gordon who was never on the same level as Joe, in the first place. Gordon, who took the control in his hands and started acting like something he never was before, something he knew nothing about. The talking Macintosh Joe saw back at COMDEX couldn't leave his mind, but since he was unable to share it with anyone, it did nothing but eating him from the inside.

Last night the Giant officially left for the market and he became a minor part in someone's thank you speech. That's what he got. Until Lorena came in her crimson dress, then played him out again.

Joe drops the cover off of himself. It's almost six in the morning. He walks out of the bedroom, what he needs is an icy cold shower to help soothing his anger. That's when he gets a glimpse of her from the corner of his eyes. Lorena's sitting on top of the desk in the living room, her feet resting on the chair. She's wrapped in the man's white bathrobe, watching the waking city through the glass wall. He walks behind her, touching her shoulders carefully over the thick fabric. The lawyer only turns around for a moment to see him.

"I'm slightly disappointed, Joe. You don't have a sofa. Strange enough, still fine. But how come you don't have coffee?" He doesn't even bother with hiding the grin, sitting down in the chair instead, taking the woman's feet in his lap, joining her to take in the sight.

Something he never wasted time on before. He leans his head against her chest, listening to her heartbeat, feeling the tension leaving his muscles.

"So where's the Picasso from?"

"Does it matter?"

"No, it doesn't. But I'm still curious."

"It's from my father."

"Your father?"

"Yes, my father. He's an art dealer." Joe looks up at her questioningly. "What? Cubism is not his favorite. He prefers the impressionists. And antique furniture. And blackjack."

9. Playing With Fire

****Playing with fire****

The door bangs loudly behind Lorena. The familiar warmth is nowhere to be found in Bosworth's office since Joe took it over for himself, and the lawyer did everything to avoid paying a visit inside of the lion's chamber, but her patience has reduced itself to zero already. Joe's sitting at his desk, refusing to look up from his papers as she's rushing inside, the thick carpet is stifling the sound of her heels as she's getting closer with her usual long steps. It was about time for her to finally make the move, though it might have taken longer than Joe expected, nearly balking his plan. The papers make a muffled noise on the table when Lorena drops them in front of the man. She inhales deeply, repressing her need to slap him across the face right away for putting her in a situation like this. It's almost believable that he's working.

"What is it?" He's still refusing to make eye contact with the woman, enhancing her already massive irritation towards him.

"_What is it?_ Are you kidding me?" She leans on the desk with her hands, lowering her body to meet Joe's gaze when he finally glances up. He knows exactly how much she can't be deceived, but can't miss the opportunity to watch her losing her temper.

"I have less than an hour to review this contract, Lorena. Why don't you make an appointment with my secretary?" The little smirk appears on her face, eyes gleaming with annoyance. She's obviously not in the mood for games.

"Please forgive me for disturbing you while you're in such a hurry, Mr. MacMillan. I'm afraid your secretary must be in the bathroom, reapplying her lipstick after all the hard work she does for you. Don't worry, I wouldn't want to waste your precious time, all you need to do is sign my papers and I'm out of here."

"No."

"No? That's it?"

"What do you want me to say?" Joe runs his fingers through his hair, ruthlessly reminding the lawyer of how much she'd want to do the same thing. Substantially harder, especially in given circumstances.

"I don't think you understand me, Joe. The last thing I need is to hear you speak. What I want from you is to take that pen in your hand and put your signature on the dotted line."

"Your resignation is refused. Meaning, I will not sign anything." Lorena's blinking with disbelief. She had no doubt about Joe making it moderately easy for her to leave, and she was up for the challenge. But it's been three weeks since they were passing her files back and forth between each other without a single word.

One thing is for sure, Joe is not about to change his mind. He's still incredibly enraged at the woman. After all, that happened between them, less than 24 hours later, he found that folder accurately placed in the middle of his desk. Her resignation. At that very moment, all Joe wanted was to rip the door off to her office, grab her by the shoulders and shouting into her face about how betrayed he felt. But he had to restrain himself. He couldn't allow anybody, particularly not Lorena to see how much he was hurt. His ego was in a severe agony, he was aching for getting even with the lawyer. Ignoring her ambitions to leave Cardiff behind was the only way he could make her angry until finding something better to pay it all back with. Because Joe would never let her get out of his reach just like this. The very thought of the woman being allowed to walk out of his life is enough to make his fists clench.

"Is this your final decision? I warn you to choose your words wisely, because whatever is you're about to say, I'm taking it seriously." Her tone backs just what she says. She takes her hands off of the table, standing up tall, her whole body tensed with rage, eyes fixed on the man.

Now it's Joe's turn to stand up and lean on the desk, using his physical size to intimidate the lawyer, despite the fact that he knows how much she's become immune to it. But it does irritate her, and she looks even more appetizing when she's pissed off completely. The way it turns her on. Like an aphrodisiac.

"It is my final decision. So you better call IBM and inform them of the change."

"You really are a prick, aren't you? I'm utterly surprised that you don't even try to play me out, and just straight up doesn't give a shit. Let me point it out that you do this for nothing. Tell me, Joe, what did you think? That I'm going to worship your dick from that moment till eternity?" The silence is trailing between them as Joe's Adam's apple is sliding up and down, an obvious hint that he's about to detonate at any moment.

Joe needs all of his willpower to hold himself back from pushing the woman against the closest wall, pressing his body into hers just to help recall the way she was moaning under his touch, that luxurious lingerie drenched with desire, her hands all over his body, wanting more and more. He swallows though the memory makes his mouth run dry. His pants are getting less comfortable with every little detail he can call back. Every little thing he wants to do to her, again.

"I don't owe you any kind of explanation for my actions. Don't make me remind you that I am your boss. And you are my employee. The rest has nothing to do with it, even if you'd like to believe that."

"That's the point, there is no 'rest' between us. I am perfectly aware of you being my superior, which is an absolute nonsense and there's no way I'll let you boss me around. Honestly, I don't care at all what your motive is. You can try and chain me down, but I'm a Houdini. And you know it, Joe"

If the man ever thought she's only teasing him with the intention of getting away from Cardiff, it's definitely time to reconsider. She didn't get the nickname 'Bull' for nothing, that's for sure. On the other hand, nobody has the permission to leave Joe behind. He is the one throwing people away and not the other way around. He has to feel needed and wanted and craved, missed and begged to. He is the one in control. More precisely, he used to be.

"You are not in the position to give me orders, so don't even waste your time telling me what to do. I have nothing more to say about your case, it's already settled. Despite what you think, I'm not keeping you around because of personal issues. I'm keeping you around because I want the company to be represented by someone who has the efficiency to do it."

"Personal issues? What? Save your performance for someone who actually cares. Don't be ridiculous, tell me what you want. Oh, silly me, how could you tell? You have no idea, right Joe? It's just another try to make everything be about you. I'm so done with it." Lorena takes a step towards the man, curious about what his reaction is going to be, keeping her glare on him.

Their verbal communication is useless from the start, they can never seem to make each other understand. It only functions as the most rabid kind of foreplay between them that never seem to be anything but successful. The woman's chest heaves with both rage and excitement, and the look on Joe's face leaves no doubt about how much he's waiting for her to make the move. If she'd stretch her hands out, she could easily reach him for a touch. But that touch would probably turn into a grip, and that turn into nails digging deep into his skin, burning hot sighs against his neck, his lips. Exactly the way he wants the scene to be played.

"I can see through you, Joe. As tempting as the situation is, I'm not that desperate. Though I must confess, I love making you hard." She tilts her head to the side, measuring the man up and down with her eyes, giving a long look at his pelvic area, smiling. "And I bet you are."

Joe walks up to the lawyer, stepping behind her, carefully running his fingertips on her arms, from the side of her palms, all the way up to the shoulders, making her breath quicken. Her eyes closed as he's gently massaging her neck, keeping the distance between them.

"Why don't you find it out? We both know you couldn't resist, Lorena." Physically, it's only half a step that separates them. Mentally, it's a rift. A war about power and control. One of them has to give up in order to collide.

Joe bends forward and tastes the skin on the back of her neck. He was hungry for the woman for such a long time. He is hungry for her since the morning he woke up to find her sitting in front of the glass wall at his apartment, wearing his robes, leaving her scent on it to torture him after she walked out of the door like nothing ever happened. Lorena bites on her lower lip to prevent herself from letting a moan escape from her mouth. But nothing can save her from letting it go once she can feel Joe's body pushing into hers, throwing her head back against his shoulder, indulged by the feeling of his massive erection. The lawyer would push him away. If only she could. But she's already moving with him, back and forth; holding onto his wrists tightly, guiding his hands wherever she wants them to go. And Joe participates willingly, re-discovering her the way she covets. The air is getting more static with every sigh, their hips keep on rocking, and the ache to feel each other slowly turns unbearable.

"You won't run away..." He whispers into Lorena's ear, her head's still on his shoulder.

"Because you won't let me?"

"Because you don't want to go. But there's one thing you should know: you are not irreplaceable."

Lorena freezes instantly, standing straight, eyes wide open. Letting go of the man's wrists, she turns around to face him, her expression is menacing.

"What did you say?"

Joe stabs his stare into hers, absorbing every moment of his revenge, ignoring how hard it was for him to stop, keeping himself from fulfilling their need of each other when she was ready to give in.

"You are not irreplaceable, Lorena. In fact, you are already replaced." He sits back behind his desk, taking a look at his watch. Everything goes the way he planned it, and they're getting closer to the main attraction.

"What are you talking about?" The lawyer finds it hard to keep a straight face, she's been obviously defeated. How could she be so wrong to think there's no trick. An unexplainable, obtuse pain is starting to spread through her veins, the feeling of helpless rage.

After a short knock, the secretary appears by the door.

"Mr. MacMillan, Cameron Howe is here. Should I walk her to her office?"

"Tell her to wait for a minute and I will take care of it myself. We're already finished with Ms. Maze, I believe." Lorena turns to Joe in slow motion, the whole situation feels surreal and strangling. She might be extremely outraged at the man, but nothing can compare to the way she feels about herself.

"Oh yeah. We are done. Congratulations! Although I'd add one little

thing as a side-note, Mr. MacMillan: you're hair raisingly pathetic, I hope you know that. Though, you were right. I better call IBM." Her smile makes Joe's stomach turn.

* * *

><p>The conference room is filled with giggles and unclaimed shoes. Two pairs of small, violet ones and a big, black one, not in any significant order. Only the long table seems to be in place. The chairs are parked up next to the glass wall, except for the ones that are covered with a gigantic, plaid blanket. The noises are unmistakably coming from underneath. It's completely understandable that a shelter was needed since the rest of the room looks like it encountered a tornado. Lorena crosses her arms on her chest, clearing her throat. What she sees can't be real.<p>

A blonde head appears from the inside of the improvised tent, her cheeks red with excitement, a proud smile vibrating on her lips before her sister would join in, sitting halfway out from under the cover. Lastly, Joe appears. It's a mystery how he managed to fit inside, but there he is with rolled up sleeves and a wide grin. However interesting the conditions are, swooning is absolutely not an option. What the lawyer's left with is nothing but irony. The perfect weapon to conceal whatever her natural, female senses screaming inside of her head as a reaction to Joe MacMillan entertaining Gordon's daughters the way he does. The same Joe MacMillan that makes her want to smash his face on any given surface she could find, the same arrogant, cocky asshole.

"Good to see you in your natural habitat, surrounded by people on the same maturity level as you. So touching. Girls, I couldn't find crayons, but here are some color pencils instead."

"Thank you, but we won't need those anymore. Joe built us a fort! Isn't it pretty?" The excessive enthusiasm in the little blond's tone shows how much he bought both of them within only five minutes while they were left alone. This is his profession, after all.

"It's a real masterpiece." The conversation is over for Lorena, she's not part of his fan base. But she's facing different kind of opponents that she's normally used to. Kids. And for them, the conversation is far from being over.

"Do you want to come inside?"

"Come inside, come inside, come inside!" They chanting, jumping around the woman in one second, kneeling at the entrance of their mighty fort in the next one.

"Okay, maybe for a minute."

"But you have to take your shoes off, so it will stay nice and clear inside." Lorena does as she is told, she's got absolutely no experience in reasoning with an eight-year-old, especially one that obviously knows what neatness is. Joe's watching her moves carefully, his insides ache while she's putting her heels aside, the memory of what happened the last time she did the same thing is more than vivid in his brain.

"Woah, this is so big! Can I try it on? Please, let me try it on!"

Unlike the man, the girls can't hide their admiration toward the red pumps.

"I don't think you should try it on. As you said, it's big and I don't want you to fall on your little face. You have plenty of time to grow into a pair of these and also, it is very, very expensive."

"Why are you wearing these? Aren't you afraid of falling on your face?"

"She wears these all the time." Joe's piercing his stare into the woman's eyes, only the two of them knows what he's talking about.

"Do you like it?" The question goes to the man, his face locked inside of the tiny palms of the blonde though he doesn't even have the time to answer.

"Is he your boyfriend?" The brown haired sister is somewhat suspicious. She's the older one, she already knows how things work, for sure.

"No, he's not my boyfriend." Lorena reacts without hesitation, she's making her way into the tent on all fours. She's absolutely not dressed for such an activity.

"Why?"

"What do you mean, why?"

"I think he likes you. Look at his face!" The younger sister is still having her hands on each side of the man's cheeks, leaning closer to him with wide eyes, touching his nose to hers. "Will you be my boyfriend instead?"

"No, Haley! He's too old!" The other girl is surely not supporting her sister's love life.

"How old are you?"

"I'm 35." She's terrified by such a large number, quickly letting go of Joe's face.

"You are old."

"Only on the surface." Lorena can't suppress the comment, but the girls are already on another topic.

"What is your job?"

"I'm a lawyer."

"Bah, that's so boring." The brown haired girl waves with her hand theatrically.

"Do you know what a lawyer does?"

"My dad told me that they lie all the time."

"Nice, I'm going to discuss this with your dad later."

After a short knock, Debbie appears in the room. Her face tells a silent tale about how horrible the surroundings may look, and she's already floated with work.

Originally, she should have taken care of the Clark girls. She was close to crying when Gordon asked her to keep an eye on them, implying that it would be even better if she could just keep both eyes on them. Just for an hour, he said. The way she looked was completely in sync with how she felt. Miserable.

"Ms. Maze, you got a phone call. I-I don't know if I understood it correctly, but I think it's _Mr. MacMillan._"

* * *

><p>Joe's lungs forget how to work. It's not oxygen that fills them anymore. It's fire. His insides are waving like the sea during a storm. He should've been ready. He should've known the lawyer enough to be prepared for her next step. But he was careless and let her push him out of his glorious position, upsetting him with an unexpected move. And he is upset. The world disappears behind his rage as he's rending the door open, dashing towards Lorena's office with enormous steps. The woman clashes against his chest, not expecting to find him on the doorstep while on her way out.

"What the fuck are you doing?" The surprise on his face is honest. As well as the wrath that's growing into new dimensions with every millisecond as the information sinks into his brain. It's causing him physical pain not to grab the woman by the throat. He's towering above her but she obviously can't be frightened like this anymore.

"Calm down, Joe! What's wrong with you? You terrify those kids, for god's sake. I don't care if you want to make a show but leave them out of it!" The two girls are pressing their foreheads against the glass wall in the conference room, absorbing every moment of the sudden change of mood. They don't understand what ruined the fun.

"Go back inside." His order means absolutely nothing for the woman, she's still pressing against him, signaling her intention to not back down.

"Get out of my way. You're damaging the color of my aura." Lorena provokes a nasty smile on the man's face.

"I said, go back inside! Now!" His shout echoes from the walls. If there were anyone who wasn't giving them attention, now they do. The lawyer slowly makes a step back without taking her eyes off of Joe. He grabs her firmly by the arm, slamming the door behind them.

"What bothers you, Joe? Should I make you some herbal tea? I'm worried about your health." She's still in his grip, feeling it tightening with every word she says.

"Shut up, Lorena! Just shut up."

"Are you plotting against me behind my back? Oh well, this is what I

call a counterplot. You won't let me go to IBM? Fine. Then IBM will come to me." The warmth of victory is lightly spreading in her body, she can read the man's mind, she knows just what he's thinking, but she needs to hear it from him.

"How long exactly you've been fucking with my father?" The words forcing themselves out of his mouth, the pain in his chest is something new, something unfamiliar.

"You wanted to challenge me? I accept. But you will lose. And I'm going to make sure you'll never attempt to try it again." Lorena fights back the urge to take his face into her palms and admire his pain, remembering the way she felt when the man played her out, stabbing her in the back.

"You have three more seconds to answer the question."

"I know what you want to hear. Still, I'm going to be honest with you. Not because you deserve it, but simply because it's a lot more amusing." She strokes the hair out of his face, gently touching his lips with the tip of her finger, giving a little time before the final kick. "Despite what your paranoia's been making you think, I've never fucked your daddy before, Joe. Ever. Except for the last two weeks. I might even owe you a big thank you for the idea."

"Aren't you just a little girl aiming to play in the big boys' league, trying to give me a rough time?" The man leans forward to her ear, ruffling the little hairs near her neck, sending a flash of desire down her spine.

"I wish I could say I'm sorry, but the fact is, I'm not. Actually, your face is priceless. My bad, I thought we play hard. Cameron? Really? As I said before: pathetic."

"So is this your strike back for getting even with me? I didn't know you care this much, Lorena." The woman puts her fingers around his throat, pushing him away sturdily, forcing out an eye contact.

"I don't want to get even. I want to demolish you into the ground and watch you burn. And if I have to get my hands dirty in order to make it happen, so be it."

"Why would you make it easy when you can make it hard?" A smile appears on Lorena's face, Joe's following her hand with his eyes as she's taking it back, wishing he could still feel her touch.

"Exactly. Speaking about hard, wish me fun for tonight." She easily walks to the door, her stroll is confident as ever, turning back to Joe before she would leave her office. "Did you know how many things you actually inherited from your dad? I'm constantly amazed."

10. Enigma

****A/N:** A big thank you to Silently Tearful for the endless support, I hope you'll have fun reading this one as well!**

****Surferosa:** Is this what you expected, love? *wink* I'm getting pumped up for THE next one!**

****Thank you guys for following the story! I can't help but endlessly enjoy writing it :)****

* * *

><p>Enigma

Though the place is one of the most expensive ones in Dallas, it's jam packed. Looks like people are happily paying the extra money for high-class french wine. Debby was right when she advised for an early reservation.

Joe and Gordon are not here for fun. Their business meeting can start any minute, and if the surroundings matter at all, they can book it as a success and Cardiff will win a rather influential partner on it's side, providing them with all the financial support they need to jump into a new project that's risky and groundbreaking, theoretically almost in the final phase. But to bring it into reality, it needs to gain enough foundation.

They're seated close to the entrance, making it easy to spot their guests arrive. Here's their best chance to score. The small group from Reynolds & Co. consists of the chairman himself with his vice and the company's CFO. Their interest is unquestionable and they don't hide their main motive: making as much money as they can. They would invest a large amount of it in return for a notable profit. Joe does what he can do best, setting in his greatest weapon, his charisma.

It takes a split second. That's how long he sees it from the very corner of his eye. He can't be wrong, not with this. Gordon talks intensely about the Giant's creation, all the innovation it bears, not mentioning how much he was against almost all of them. Not like it matters anymore. The perfect moment for Joe to excuse himself. He gets up from the table, sharing a few words with the host at the door. The guy discretely points his index finger in the direction of the balcony.

Joe's not in a rush. The sudden change in the situation wasn't planned ahead, but it happened. Now he needs to improvise as he's unhurriedly making his way out to the wooden tables under the white, ruffled canopy. He barely needs his eyes to find what he's looking for, the scent is enough to follow. The scent that can't be mistaken for anything else and he's smelling it out like a predator from a hundred miles, burning his insides with hunger.

Lorena's sitting with her back facing Joe, the straps of her aquamarine dress barely hiding her skin. She's not alone. The pair sitting in front of her look like they just stepped out of a classic Hollywood movie, vintage elegance with an undoubtedly luxurious taste. Of course, where else would have the lawyer inherited the ability to manage her own style the professional way she does?

The woman perceives the shadow falling on their table, biting off the second half of the sentence, her parents raising their eyes higher in perfect synchronization.

"Ms. Maze, I wasn't expecting to meet you here." Lorena isn't containing herself from splashing the wine into the man's face

because it was extra pricey. She's holding it back because that's precisely what Joe wants. A show. And she's not willing to give it to him, especially not within these circumstances. She's rejecting to turn around.

"Mr. MacMillan, what an awful surprise." Though Joe was ready to see something on the faces of her parents, a pale sparkle of recognition that his name rings a bell, but there's nothing. Lorena knows she can't avoid the introduction, and it's fairly believable that the man just appeared for a quick hello. No, he's here to ruin and to meddle himself into something he's got nothing to do with. Joe's quicker than she is when he meets the questioning eyes of her father, taking the occasion and introducing himself instead, his arm stretched out for a handshake.

"Joe MacMillan. I'm Ms. Maze's boss." Lorena chuckles softly.

"Let me correct you, you're one of my bosses. But you're most definitely my least favorite one."

"Paul Maze. The only father of Ms. Maze." He blows out the smoke from the cigarillo, his gaze wonders from Joe to Lorena and back. "My wife, Valerie Maze." He puts his hand carefully on the woman's shoulder, they're a magnificent view.

It's hard for Joe not to shout into Lorena's face. In fact, his expression is perfectly coordinated, an inexperienced eye would never figure out about all the wrath inside. The woman keeps her eyes away from him, her ignorance is more than infuriating. But it's okay. She will regret it, he's going to make sure about that one.

"Who knows, Ms. Maze? Our relationship can turn out to be quite more than formal if I might have to call you 'mom'." He smiles widely, relishing in the way the woman turns around in slow motion, staring at him with dragon fire in her eyes.

"Excuse me?" Paul leans forward, his glare is dark as he's focusing on Lorena, he certainly wants her to explain what he just heard, but Joe ignores it completely.

"I'm sure Ms. Maze already told you about dating my father. Aren't you?" The urge to say she's fucking him was stronger than ever, but he had to fight it. And he's done. There's nothing more he could say to worsen the damage.

The silence's causing physical pain as it's getting longer and longer. The tension intensifies between Paul and Lorena without sharing a word, though Valerie places a warm touch on her husband's arm with hopes that it will help calm him down, but they're passed the point of that. She stands up, hooking on Joe's arm, flashing a kind smile at him.

"Take a walk, shall we?" He accepts the offer though it takes an effort to conceal his bloodthirsty mood.

They're leaving the father-daughter duo under the canopy, walking back inside of the building, taking a seat at the bar area. Valerie's signal is smooth but clean-cut, she will sit facing the balcony, divesting the man from enjoying the mess he made. She orders whiskey for both of them, before getting in eye contact with Joe.

The woman tilts her head a little, she's beautiful and she knows it, her eyes and lips are familiar, Lorena bears the exact copy of them.

"Once you'll have a kid you'll understand that regardless of their age, they'll always be your little baby. But you think you know everything, don't you?" Raising the glass at Joe, she takes a sip of the honey colored liquid. Her eyes wander to the spot outside, not lingering for too long. "I wanted her to have a peaceful and calm life like every mother would. But I had to accept that my realization about peacefulness is slightly different than hers." The man bathes in the way Valerie talks about Lorena, soaking up every little detail that might be scattered. "She's more like her father."

He knows nothing about the lawyer. The thought aches inside of his guts. The only thing she shared with him was Luke. His grip tightens around the glass as the memory's floating in.

"She's got persistence." The statement draws a soft smile on the woman's face.

"She does. And fortitude. She was standing a good chance to be a prima ballerina like I used to be."

"Ballerina?" The vision of her naked body floods him with excitement. He can still recall every freckle on her.

"She was very talented. But it wasn't challenging enough and she's very competitive, as I'm sure you know." There's something in the woman's look that makes Joe feel like she can hear the thought running through his head, get a peek on every image. She catches his trail of thought. "Tell me what outcome are you hoping to get out from this, hm? I warn you to be very careful. There's nothing more important for a parent than her child. And I will save my daughter from whatever is endangering her, may it be you or anything else that threatens to harm. Ask your father, he'd say the same."

* * *

><p>What should it say about a company, that is otherwise considered professional and serious, if they celebrate the 20th anniversary of its funding at a local bar with strippers hanging from the ceiling?" The last thing Lorena wanted to spend her evening with was a party at some filthy strip-club with Joe.<p>

If Gordon wouldn't enjoying himself at a dinner with his birthday wife right now, she shouldn't be wasting her time with such an unwanted activity. But here they are and Joe's passing the third red light since he picked the woman up from her home. His request for a casual attire failed miserably. The lawyer couldn't cheat on her usual self, wearing a tight, knee-length, sleeveless navy dress with the inevitable high heels, looking so appetizing Joe has to force himself to look away.

"We're two days from signing up with Reynolds & Co. We have to have them and I'm sure you'll make a bigger impact on them as Gordon would." The sleeves of his leather jacket are tucked up to his elbows, he rarely walks around in other than a suit but now he's dressed for putting dollars in panties, with dark jeans and a black

shirt.

* * *

><p>Lorena puts the glass down on the counter, slowly turning to her left. Her smile is menacing, just like the edge in her tone.<p>

"I suggest you take your hands off me as quickly as you put it there. In case you want to keep that particular limb." The man doesn't move, his eyes are blurry. His face is not completely unfamiliar to the lawyer, but he could be anyone from that gigantic mass she found herself face to face since her arrival.

"I love this type. Playing the hard-to-get one." He's obviously drunk, but from the worst kind. The ones who become their true, sociopathic selves once the alcohol hits in, unfolding their hideous personalities to the whole world to see, being totally proud of it.

"Excuse me?" The stranger's stomping on her personal space with two feet. She leans away but it won't soothe her aura and she's anything but used to this kind of disrespect.

"I want to convince you otherwise, sugar, let's get out of here." The look on the woman's face is the expression she reserves for outstandingly repulsive-looking insects, but considering the situation, it is absolutely acceptable to use it. Too bad the intruder doesn't know what to do with the signs. He makes a sudden attempt to reach for the lawyer's neck with his mouth, but he's not in the condition to see straight, missing out on the opportunity.

"Do I look like I'm interested?" She might sound sarcastic and she is, but 1% of her question is still honest and is nothing but pure curiosity.

"Your denial is unnecessary from this point. I can read between the lines"

"I have serious doubts you can read at all. Who are you, again? A qualified mind reader?"

"That's what I'm talking about." The man's hand slides a bit lower on the woman's waist, his lips pouting. The consumed amount of alcohol makes him believe he's a real-life Don Juan. He's wrong, but it doesn't stop his grip to go even lower, the touch turns her stomach.

"Why don't we get back to the point where you remove your claws from me, and take the chance to walk away until you can, pretending that nothing happened?" A smile from the ugly kind spreads on the guy's face, he's not planning on moving away. He's already picked the toy he wanted to play with for the rest of the evening.

"This is what bitches like you do. Acting all unapproachable, but we both know what you want." She's straight up attacked, not only physically but verbally, and it makes her want to breathe fire.

"Please, tell me what I want." The sound of her own blood rushing in

her ears is louder than ever before.

"You're trembling for a good fuck, aren't you?" His hand reaches the critical point, roughly grabbing on the woman's butt.

Lorena doesn't even have time to react, a well-known, deep voice explodes from behind her back just like a thunder.

"Let go of her. Now." Joe stares at the guy with determination. The people near them go dead silent.

"Or what?" He removes the hand from the woman, his posture is pure provocation.

Joe's wasting no time. The drunken chairman of the celebrating company sweeps down at least two tables as the momentum from the punch on his jaw drags him backward. His face is a mess, the shirt he's wearing is not white anymore, it's red, the exact color of his blood. Joe steps in front of him, towering above the man with a disgusted expression. Lorena pushes herself away from the counter, reaching Joe with long steps, putting her palm on his back, aware of how much she won't be able to stop him if he wants to destroy. The stain on the floor is getting bigger. Don Juan spits blood.

"I hope you have a good lawyer."

"You just insulted my best one." Joe's visibly struggling to hold himself back. If he'd let the animal out, it might tear the bloody-faced jerk apart into tiny little pieces. If he could listen to his own body for a single second, he'd realize how much his muscles are sore, tensed up like an arrow that's getting ready to be shot. It's only that little, warm spot on his back that helps him getting back into reality, swallowing the bitter taste of revenge, the careful touch of a small hand. He turns away from the mess, grabbing the woman by the arm while walking out of the club, followed by the hungry eyes of the crowd.

They're marching towards the Porsche in the parking lot. The relative silence after the blasting music is more than deafening. The cops can arrive at any minute, at least, it's what they expect. But there isn't any sign of sirens getting near them.

"I can't leave you alone for a minute." Joe speaks without looking at Lorena, his fingers are still tight around her arm though she's easily keeping up with his mile long steps.

"Do I sense reproach in here? I don't remember asking for help. I do not require protection from anyone. Especially not from you."

"Of course, you don't. You karate chopped that asshole with your remarkable sarcasm. I take you home." Reaching the car, the woman ignores the opened door, she's not willing to take the offer.

"You're not taking me home. I can take care of myself, thank you."

"Lorena, you're a trouble magnet on legs. Get in the car. I'm not arguing on this one with you." One hand on the door, the other is on the roof, he's blocking both sides she could escape, looking down at

her with his head tilted to the right, signaling that there's only one way out of the situation, and that's following his order and taking the passenger seat.

None of them says a single word during the whole ride. There's not much they could talk about when they're forced to be way closer than they should, locked up in a sealed, metal cage. Lorena keeps her head turned away, staring at the passing street lamps though she doesn't see them at all. The screen in her mind is playing the same scene over and over again with Joe stepping out of nowhere and acting so carelessly that it makes her palms itchy. The idiot. Exactly the way he is, turning a blind eye on all of the consequences, responding without thinking. Lorena entwines her fingers in her lap, fighting the urge to lock them around the man's neck the way he'd deserve it. He has no idea how lucky he is, how lucky they are both. It could've ended so much worse than this, but it probably never even crossed his mind.

Joe parks the car in front of the lawyer's place, stopping it right next to her darling Mustang. The first time he saw her getting into it seemed like a joke until it turned out how mouthwatering the woman looks behind the wheel. Nobody believed it belonged to her when they first saw it in the parking lot. At a weak moment, somebody dared to ask her about how come a woman drives such a beast. The lawyer's answer was easy:

"So I can't ride whatever I want because of the fact that I'm a female? All right then, consider that car as my dick. And that's most definitely bigger than yours." The guy greets her from a mile away ever since whenever they meet up at the office.

Lorena makes her way out of the Porsche, not doubting for a single minute that her night won't just end here. Joe won't let it. They might've remained silent in the last forty-something minutes, but her skin was crawling with the feeling of anticipation to hear what the man has to say. If he thinks she's already forgotten his performance in front of her parents, behaving pathetically like a kid who doesn't want to get out of the toy store empty handed.

Joe doesn't need an invitation to step into the house with her. He's tightly behind the woman, aroused by the thought of having the opportunity to finally get a peek at her empire. She drops her heels down, making his stomach turn with desire right away, and he can't be sure if she did it on purpose or not. And here they are, trying to outsmart one another, circling around the matter like a lion does with his prey.

"I'd show you around but what would be the point of that?" The little smirk is sitting on the corner of the lawyer's lips, eyeing the man intensely.

"Be careful, Lorena. You might get yourself in trouble." Joe gets out of his leather jacket, hanging it right on top of a blush colored blazer with the intention of leaving his smell on it for her, making the woman wear him the next time she puts that one on, fighting himself into her mind unconsciously.

"What could I say? I'm busted already. You've put me in trouble and you know that. I'm not showing you around, Joe, this is a perfect spot for you to apologize." She's not blinking. The smirk is still

present, yet she sounds fully serious.

The man shakes his head slowly, a grin spreading on his face.

"Somebody got scolded, I see. I wasn't meant to upset your father, especially now that he might have to worry about inviting his buddies over when his little princess is around, seeing how you might get in the mood for some mature devotion." There's a severe staring contest going on between them. Lorena can barely keep a straight face, Joe's getting closer to the line that she won't let him overstep.

"First of all, how dare you approach my parents and drag them into your fucked up little game? I advise you not to come nearer to my family. They have nothing to do with you."

"I really hope you're not serious with that question. Considering that you're fucking my father it sounds quite ridiculous. Though, your mother is gorgeous, if I may say so. We had a nice chat together while daddy laid you on his knees for being such a nasty little girl." He's leaving out the details of how much at some point it seemed like Valerie could read his mind, seeing right through him. He can't confess what his real reason was. He can't confess that it all happened because of Lorena, because she never mentioned him, never talked about him. Never let them know about his existence. When all he wanted was to be sure he's constantly on her mind, overtaking her thoughts and dreams. She simply ignored him.

"Get out, Joe. Leave right now." The woman won't tolerate him anymore. This kind of provocation is too tasteless for her to handle, and Joe's endeavor to drive her off the cliff is working perfectly.

It's like she never said a thing. None of them moves. Joe will not back down. She can't make him turn around and leave just like this. The line's been rudely overstepped and he's aware of that. But he can't let himself be the only one suffering. He steps closer to the lawyer, wondering if she's going to move away, but she isn't. Joe scoops the hair behind her ears, holding her cheeks with both hands, his thumb softly brushing against her lips. The woman touches the knuckles on his right, the one he used to punch that drunken bastard with, rushing to her rescue. He lets her remove that hand, taking a close look at it, outlining the bruises with a fingertip.

"Idiot."

"Your welcome." The man shoves her against the wall, feeling her chest heaving under him.

"You're rudely taking advantage of my hospitality, Joe." Lorena grabs the back of his neck roughly, biting her lower lip to muffle the sound of her moan as his body's grinding on hers, pushing her to the limit of her self-control where there will be no turning back anymore.

Her fingers tracing the tight muscles under his shirt and she's not restraining herself from stopping above his belt, though she hesitates for a moment and makes sure Joe acknowledges it, just to see the look on his face. He closes his eyes with delight, dropping

his head back as he can feel the lawyer's firm grip. His erection is so massive, it threatens to destroy the fabric between him and the woman, hardly being able to hold himself back.

* * *

><p>The feeling is familiar and more than desired. It feels like the earth is shaking, rocking her into the state of bliss where nobody else can ever put her. Nobody, except for Joe. His unpredictable ways, the thin line between him being gentle then turning rough in an instant, making her scream his name or just moan it when her lungs and vocal chords can't take it anymore. The way he feels, every little bit of his body on her, around her, inside of her. His taste that can't be compared to anything or anyone else. His sweetness mixes up with the taste of brandy, creating an excellent flavor combination. The man's hot breaths are burning her naked back, his groaning sounds like music to her ears. She grabs the sheets with both hands, the sensation of the upcoming orgasm makes her skin prickle. The thrusts are intensifying as Joe's getting closer and closer to the climax and she wants to reach the point with him but it's so hard to focus when the whole room is getting blurry, the muscles in her body are tensing up, her walls closing around him, holding him inside while she's collapsing on the bed, repeating his name a million times. Joe pulls her up like she's weightless, their skin meets and she can feel the hotness spreading inside of her, dipping her nails into his arms as he's leaning against the nape of her neck, whispering.<p>

"...Lorena..." It's not her name.

Cameron turns around with wide eyes, the last waves of her orgasm are still washing over her, unsure if she really heard it correctly or just her imagination playing a trick on her.

"What?"

Joe knows it's too late to correct himself, so he doesn't even try to sort it out. And how could he? It's her that was in his head the whole time, she should have been shaking under his touch, whining for more, that astonishing scent mixed up with passion, easing his thirst from her mouth.

This is how it should have been. But Lorena dropped him out. She put his body to the test so much that one more stroke could've been enough to make him explode, and though she was shaking with rapture from head to toe, he was thrown out. Her voice was hoarse.

"I would, Joe. But I won't. And since I'm so easily replaceable, I'm sure you'll find a substitute. Either your hands or your little girlfriend." The exact words that left her lips. The lips that were swollen and red with lust. The ones she never let him taste.

"Joe, tell me you didn't just call me on the name of that bitch!" Everything makes sense now for Cameron, why she found Joe MacMillan on the doorstep in the middle of the night, agitated and turned on, flaming with anger. She jumps out of the bed, the man's following every move with his eyes, refusing to answer a question they both know the answer to. "Were you together?"

"I'm sorry if I hurt you, Came-"

"If you hurt me? If?" She stares at Joe with disbelief. "You're fucking kidding me right now."

"You need to calm down and come back here." His words are useless at the moment and it's something he's not used to at all. Especially not from Cameron. He walks up to her, looking down at her exposed body, stabbing his gaze right into hers. He's not touching the girl just yet, it's his perfect choreography. "I never promised you anything that I didn't keep. You know that. I need you at Cardiff and I need you outside Cardiff. But you can't force me to make promises that I can't keep up with. If you want to end this, it takes a single word. It's your decision." He places a long stroke on her arm, his timing is brilliant. It was and will be never Cameron's choice. He found out the way she can be manipulated a long time ago. And it works perfectly every single time. "But if you want to continue, I'm here for you whenever you feel like you need me."

The girl doesn't even have to say anything. Her eyes are selling her out. There might be a war inside of her right now, but nothing can be stronger than the way she wants to have Joe around. Not even jealousy. Not anything her common sense keeps shouting inside of her head. It's like an addiction and Joe is the worst kind of drug. She's willingly accepted to be ruined and used, hoping that he can change. That he will change, because of her.

11. Nature Of The Beast

****Nature of the beast****

The waiters are busy running around the guests' tables, refilling their glasses, offering tissues. The hiatus grows longer as the emotional speech of the future bride turned too emotional, causing her to break out in tears. The weeping spreads like a virus around the large hall, even the crystal chandeliers look like they were made out of teardrops. Teardrops those worth millions.

A random server refills Lorena's glass for the umpteenth time, as the pale rose colored wine keeps on disappearing. She keeps her eyes on the girl sitting at the master table, her face buried in the neck of her fiancé as he keeps on fondling her back soothingly. The lawyer's face looks like it was carved out of marble, she's emotionless. Only the amount of beverage she consumes can sell her out but nobody knows how she feels inside. Not even Joe, though she can't unsee the way he keeps on watching her from the corner of his eyes. She can't bring herself to care about it. The bizarre duo of screaming and maniac laughter is scratching her throat with bloody nails, making her rinse the bitter taste over and over again.

"I... I'm... I'm so happy despite this growing pile of tissues... I just want to thank you so much for being a part of this evening with us at this beautiful place. Michael, I love you..." The crying continues but this time, it's followed by a round of applause, glasses raising into the air in honor of the newly engaged couple.

The music starts and the floods of tears beginning to dry up, people approaching the pair to congratulate or simply making their ways to the dance floor. Bosworth's eyes are a little shinier than usual, he

was surely touched by the scene and he's the one who knows Debbie for the longest time.

Joe takes the glass out of the lawyer's hand before it could reach her lips, gifting her with a provocative smile.

"Lorena, you're drinking grown men under the table. What would your daddy say?" The woman returns the same expression, looking more sober than ever.

"I wish I could drink enough to find you tolerable, Joe. But there's no such amount of alcohol in this place, I'm afraid."

"Very well, then. Should I take you to dance or will you come by yourself?" The man swallows the last droplets of ros  from the stolen glass, rolling up his sleeves to prove his point of determination.

"This is the exact purpose why you should've brought your little girlfriends with you."

"What's wrong, Ms. Maze? Would Swan Lake put you in the mood better than this?" Joe's hand is stretched out for the woman to take but she remains still, only answering with a dry chuckle.

"I'm impressed. What other intimate secrets have you managed to pull out of my mother in that five minutes you spent together? Should I be worried?" He responds with a dark stare, letting her know that he's up for the challenge and not afraid to make a show for the sake of getting what he wants.

Lorena follows him to the floor, her squeeze appreciably stronger than necessary around his hand. Her only hope is to find him miserably talentless. Yet from the first step, he proves the woman wrong, firing her dislike even more. Wrapped tightly in the big arms, his hands resting on her waist, the way he looks down at her loftily, makes the woman want to strangle him with his tie, too bad he dropped it somewhere at their table minutes before. Left without other options, she puts her arms around his neck, following his lead to the sensuous music.

"I wonder when did you turn into a humanitarian and started to care about people? Debbie actually thinks Cardiff paid for this."

"It's not my fault that you're completely illiterate in personal politics, Joe. Let me point it out for you, Debbie puts everything under your ass. Regardless of your own secretary, who does nothing but hurting her knees under your table all day. Which is perfectly fine because that's all she's capable of. Now Debbie works for at least fifty people, organizing professional and personal lives, also knows not to talk to me until I finished my third cup of coffee in the morning. Debbie does work for your company. And people like this should be kept around. You know why? Because if one magical day they will be fed up with your bullshit, they're going to flip the bird and just walk out on you. Do you think there's nothing she could say about Cardiff? About the projects? About you? Appreciation, Joe. Before it's too late." Her indoctrination is a soft spot, especially when she's right. And she definitely is.

"And what about the dress?" The topic itself puts a smirk on her

face, being aware of how far she went with that one.

"Oh, the dress... She got that from you, Mr. MacMillan. Because you're such an abundant and kind person, showing your employees how much they matter to you."

"Five thousand dollars? For a dress? Lorena, you do this one more time and..."

"And what? You fire me? I can't wait! I'd do it a million times just to see your face."

They rarely ever dance to the rhythm of the music anymore. Pushing roughly against each other, their eyes battling for dominance. Their bodies battling against devotion. Joe lowers his hands on the woman, shoving her even closer. She exhales sharply by the feeling of his closeness.

"Don't step over the line."

"I'm pretty sure you're the one stepping it over."

"I'm pretty sure you want me to step it over."

"Put a leash on your ego, Joe, it's getting out of control. I told you before and will tell you again, you can't supervise me or order me around. I'm not your property. I don't need you."

Bosworth keeps on watching the two of them, still dancing to a non-existing song, moving slow while the pairs on the floor getting swept away by the beat of rock n roll. He knew about the power struggle between them from the start but he wasn't paying attention. Now, it's impossible not to pay attention. There is a kind of body language that can't be mistaken for anything.

"Where are you staying?" Joe's jaws are tensing up, the question that couldn't leave his mind all through the night from the moment he set his eyes on the woman as she arrived, enjoying every bit of her from head to toe, her outfit, the way he imagined her without it. She acknowledges the tone, smiling like a wolf at her prey.

"We're in New York, Joe, where do you think I stay? Don't ask questions you already know the answers to."

* * *

><p>Though it's supposed to be his home, the only familiar thing has nothing to do with the surroundings. A single thing that makes him feel warm in that house. The same house that pushes him away with it's every aspect, making his muscles clench, stirring up the memories that should be buried deep enough to avoid feeling haunted by them, yet they're mutely finding their way out of the grave, scratching the nerves under the skin. He inhales the scent deeply, giving a moment for himself to let it spread through his veins, revel in the way his body gets lost in it. Her presence is all over the place, reflecting from the stony walls, wrapping around the man like a cozy blanket, guiding him toward his father's office blindly.<p>

Lorena's sitting behind the wide desk with her eyes fixed on the

wall, indulged in the painting opposite her. Her gaze turns to Joe for a mere second, acknowledging him leaning against the door frame, an irritated expression written on his face. He doesn't move, it's like the threshold represents a cursed line he's not allowed to cross though it was most likely himself who prohibited the entry into the room. She smiles for herself shamelessly.

"What should I do with you, Joe?" The woman sighs deeply, obviously not being interested in the answer. "You're annoying, pesky and arrogant. You tire me to death." Her words work like magic, driving Joe over the edge precisely how she wanted. That little nudge is enough to help him overcome the old habits. Her glare is still lingering over the canvas, but from the corner of her eye, she can see the man pushing himself away from the door.

"The same old record. Big words from a little girl and the boring tactic you keep on using. Something tells me these speeches are more for your own reassurance than for me, Lorena." The man drops his jacket on the back of a leather armchair in front of the table, he's not sitting down, staying on his feet makes him much more powerful, this time not over the lawyer, but the odd feeling the place gives him.

"For you own sake, don't even try to analyze me. You have no idea about human nature in general, especially not when it comes to me." Lorena's method is simple but effective, the way she keeps her eyes away from him makes his blood boil. And she seems so vulnerable behind that enormous board, sitting in his father's chair with her legs crossed, looking as tempting as ever. "You find my tactics boring? Too bad, Joe. Too bad."

"I appreciate your determination to make me believe I'm up against the ferocious lawyer who can terrify me. If it only would be convincing enough." The woman stares at him, finally. Her glare burns like fire.

"Let's see if I can make you change your mind about my ferocity, shall we? I have an offer for you." The tone she's using is calm, almost neutral. Her acting is spotless, it's her breathing that can't be concealed, catching the man's eyes right away. He's not giving voice to the observation, not wanting to ruin the show just yet. A wide grin growing on his face.

"I can't help but be somewhat skeptical when it comes to your offers." Joe takes a seat, measuring the woman intensely with his eyes. She's got a plan, nothing's easier to tell.

"I believe that. But despite your skepticism, you're still here, waiting for me to bring it up. Isn't this what you call a paradox?"

"I prefer to call it curiosity. You need paradoxes? We could start with the countless times you say how much you don't need me. And now you're having deals for me. I wonder what it may be." He leans back in the chair, taking up his usual sitting position, legs wide open. It's not too long before his patience will fade away and it's a known fact for both of them.

"I'm exhausted, stressed out and frustrated. I can't function like this. You know exactly what it may be. If you accept my

conditions."

There's a short pause in the conversation. The lawyer is the queen of teasing, Joe learned that on the hard way, on his own skin, though there's barely anything that devours him more than the hunger for her. She's a player. They both are. Whoever has more aces in their hands will win the round.

"_Your_ conditions? As far as I can see it, you're the one asking for a favor, which means _your_ conditions may not occur."

"I've never considered you particularly dumb, but I feel like right now you're working extra hard on making me change my mind." The sarcastic little smirk, her trademark she reserves for nobody but Joe, appears on the corner of her lips. "We both know that you're the last person in the Milky Way I'd ask for a favor. Instead, what I'm offering you is an opportunity. A one-off opportunity. There's no pressure however, you're free to go. Excuse me, but with a right mind, you can't possibly think that I won't find someone else to take it. I mean, look around, look where we are. What does it say to you?" A muscle flinches in Joe's face, proving her score.

"It says that you're such a nasty little bitch that you won't scare away from the dirtiest tricks to get what you want."

"See? _This _is a paradox. You just told me that my tactics are boring. Two minutes later they're miraculously too much. Maybe you should take a look at yourself before moaning about _my_ dirty tricks."

"State your claims."

"No touching without permission." Joe leans forward with disbelief, it's like he couldn't properly hear the words, watching the woman with wide eyes, but she stays motionless.

"Tell me you're kidding."

"You heard me. It's either my way or we're finished."

"What's the matter, Lorena? Are you afraid of a little temptation?" She feels busted and it angers her endlessly, jumping on her feet, looking at the man mirroring the same move.

"So we're done."

"We're not done at all."

Their chests are heaving like they just completed running a marathon. The most addictive drug, their anger mixed up with passion, desperately trying to figure out who will take the lead they both crave. It's a never-ending war, a wicked power game, none of them being able to back down and give in, pushing the limit as far as they dare. The tension's getting unbearable as the room around them threatens to explode, their bodies screaming with lust, waiting for the other one to succumb.

"Lay on the sofa." The woman's words are quiet though they feel like shouting in the silence. The last chance for Joe to take, she won't beg. She will break something for sure, but only after she walked

out.

The man hesitates for a second. He's been wanting her for too long now, and she keeps on slipping through his fingers like sand whenever it looks like he could finally get a taste. With his eyes still fixed on Lorena, he walks to the spot she marked for him, his jaws clenched with rage. If she dares to leave him alone again, he will not have mercy on her. Not anymore. He will destroy her world and will make her watch as it burns. His fury grows as she remains still, not taking a single step to reach him though her eyes are following every move.

"I said lay down."

"Don't play with me, Lorena." He makes sure his tone feels as threatening as it can, a clear warning to signal how far he already passed the end point of his tolerance and he's only seconds away from detonating.

"Joe, I won't ask you one more time."

The moment the man's back reaches the smooth surface she gets out from behind the desk, making her way toward him with long steps, lingering for a split second before taking advantage of the long slit on the back of her skirt, making it relatively easy to lift one leg over the man, kneeling above his chest. The instinct to stretch his hands and feel her skin comes as naturally as breathing, but she's already two steps ahead, grabbing his wrists with the speed of light, holding them up above his head.

"We haven't even started the fun yet and you already want to break the rules?"

"You must have forgotten to mention that the rules apply only on me. Of course, you don't play fair, do you?"

"What a wonderful timing to insult me, Mr. MacMillan. Do not disregard my words. You want to touch? Fine. Let me guide you." The lawyer places his hands on her calves, not letting go of his wrists, but indicating the acceptable direction where he can move. To the back of her thighs, stroking the skirt all the way up, revealing the black, lacy garter and the matching lingerie. The sight itself is enough to make Joe moan with delight. The silky skin under his palms feels too good to be true. Her grip firmly around his wrists, taking them wherever she wants to, going higher to feel his fingers curl around her breasts, watching the man with amusement, his face is pure ecstasy.

Lorena lowers herself on Joe's chest lightly. He's panting under her, looking so appetizing that she can hardly hold herself back from tasting him. She leans forward, running the tip of his tongue on his neck, biting on his chin when she's reaching it, ignoring his mouth completely, making his frustration grow even bigger. He needs her sweetness, to drink the lust from her lips, conquering her tongue, making her drown into his kiss. But she's only torturing him with the promise of it, not willing to give him what he wants. If only she'd let him get a sample of how her body reacts to his nearness, the way he's brushing against her, laying between her thighs, sensing her blazing with fire. Lorena leans back, her eyes locked with the man's. She lets go of his wrists, reaching behind her, making him groan by

the firm squeeze around his shaft.

"God, Joe... You're massive..." She's sliding down, sitting on top of his extensive erection. He's rock hard and she doesn't even know that a simple look from her is enough to get the same result every time. A single thought of her in the middle of the night, when he wants nothing but waking up beside her, kissing the covers off of her body and make her forget every name she ever tasted except for his.

Her hips are moving with slow, sensual circles, an instant reaction as she can feel him pressing against her most sensitive spot through all the layers of clothing between them, dropping her head back with complete delight. As soon as she finds the perfect position she starts straddling him with such a remarkable technique that takes his breath away, entwining her fingers with his to keep them from defying her command, wandering in forbidden places.

"... you can't... you can't do this, Lorena..." Their gasps fill the air as her ride keeps on intensifying, bathing Joe in an ocean of endless pleasures, making him respond with a groan to every push. Though he's right. She's physically unable to continue, not because of the way her muscles are shaking from all the strain, but because it's simply not enough anymore. Her speed slowing, trying to find her breath again before getting off the man, incapable of moving away without feeling him under her palms.

They're talking in their own language, the one they both understand. The one that doesn't require words. Lorena runs her fingers through the man's hair as he's sitting up, scratching the muscles under his shirt with her nails, admiring the look on his face. Her hand guiding Joe's to show what his next move has to be and he is more than happy to obey, stroking the lacy panties off her thighs. His mouth is stopped midway to her bare skin by a strong grasp in his hair.

The lawyer turns around and makes her way back to the table, sitting on the edge. There's no need to talk, the choreography is perfect. Joe knows what to do, taking a seat in the chair in front of her, steaming with anticipation. He won't be able to steal the show from her, every move the woman makes opens brand new doors to desire, forcing him to extend his own boundaries.

She puts her golden heels on each side of the armrest next to Joe, allowing him to enjoy the most flawless spectacle he ever wished to see, making him question reality. Her hand reaches his lips and he takes her fingers into his mouth, one by one, relishing in her sighs as his tongue swirls around them, bringing back the memory of the first time she experienced what his mouth is capable of. She treats herself with a taste before making her way down, her fingers coated with him.

"You're incredible." He whispers, barely believing his own eyes while watching Lorena drawing little circles with her speed alternating between fast and slow.

Joe can't fit into his pants. How could he when it's impossible not to notice how his presence makes her feel, suffocating him into that brain melting thirst, and she's here, right in front of him, fulfilling his wildest fantasies and he can't touch, can't get a taste, can't feel her. It wouldn't take more than a blink to ignore every command she attempted to give, but he wants his reward.

Whatever that may be. He won't let the woman get what she wants, he won't give her the satisfaction of behaving as she's expecting him to do, turning the tables on her even if she's driving him straight into insanity.

"Tell me what you're thinking about."

"I'm thinking about you. In me." Her eyes are smiling as she's staring back at the man. He's clearly too tensed, fighting himself instead of loosening up and savor the sight that's for nobody else but for him exclusively, still he can't help but moan as the words leave her mouth. "Come closer, Joe. I want you to join in."

It's just like a deliriously surreal daydream he never dared to have about how she's enjoying her own body while he's standing between her legs, making his mouth run dry. The missing inches amongst them are replaced by the most vivid and arousing pictures their imagination can produce, bending the lines between delusion and reality, playing with their senses.

Every little sound coming from his mouth is like music that was composed only for Lorena's ears, from his hasty gasps to the way he keeps on tasting her name. Unable to look away from the lawyer's face, yet his hand is moving in absolute harmony with hers, aching for the smallest stroke.

"... don't stop, Joe... keep on going..."

"... like this?"

The woman's biting on her lower lip to muffle the sound of her moan. It's pointless, she can't do anything to keep herself silent anymore. Her eyes are getting glossy as the tension in her body is passing the level of sustainable, her muscles begging for release as she's growing closer to the finish line. Joe's pressing his forehead against Lorena's, feeling every bit of her fever as it reaches the climax, catching every breath from her with his own mouth.

He can't resist his craving to taste her, lifting her hand to his lips, kissing the fingertips softly before touching them with his tongue. It takes some time until the woman can find her way back to earth again, fighting some oxygen into her lungs, deafened by her own blood rush. Her joints and tendons feel like they've turned into jello when she puts her feet on the ground, hardly able to hold her own body weight while she's pulling her skirt down, fixing her attire back to perfection, purposely disregarding the black, lace panties.

"You know what annoys me the most, Joe? When you're accusing me of not being fair." Her voice is hoarse but imperious, her glance wanders from the man's face down to his hand and back at his face again. He's still holding himself strongly, not ready to decide what kind of reaction the lawyer is playing for, but there isn't much time to think about it as her touch wraps around his fingers. "I'm always fair. Always." Her eyes are gleaming with fulfillment during their mute conversation, not wasting time with giving unneeded directions for Joe, when he clearly knows exactly what to do.

Backing down to reach the sofa once again, he lowers himself to the sleek surface, feasting his eyes on the woman as she's getting down

on her knees, looking more delicious than a plate of candies. The unhurried stroke from his knees all the way up on his thighs forces Joe to arch his back with yearning. Even through the fabric of his pants, Lorena's touch is still electrifying. Sliding a bit higher, her small palm wreathing around his raging erection. The sound he makes is simply perfect, he's not even blinking, afraid of missing out on the sight, pushing his grip against the even level on both sides to avoid touching her, though his senses keep on shouting him otherwise. She's an expert in sensual torture, getting aroused rapidly with every move, flashing a look of desire before locking her lips around him, her grip still tight. The experience is out of this world good, dragging him closer to the point where he can't hold it back anymore and the lawyer shows no mercy. She's unstoppable. Her pace is dictated by the fervency of his moans until she can finally taste him on her tongue, feeling his body tensing up, heaving as she's luxuriating in every drop of his pleasure. It's washing over Joe as a wave, taking him into unknown places before he could even open his eyes.

* * *

><p>He grabs her by the arm, smothered by the question he doesn't wish to ask. The presence of his father wakes up the beast inside of him every single time, projecting the suppressed feeling to anyone around, let them be consumed by his endless loathing. The lawyer can get a hint of it on her own skin while he's dragging her by the arm. Was it all part of her plan? The fireplace fills the living room with soft sounds and warmth though the cold keeps on running up and down on the man's back. What soothes him is not the silently cracking wood.<p>

"Joe, calm down and let go of me." Her tranquility feels like a tender stroke on his ruffled nerves and he doesn't even know why. Her eyes fixed on him, offering an answer to each of his doubts. Their communication is immaculate. The arrival of Joe Sr. was just as unexpected for her.

"Come with me, Lorena."

"What would be the point of that?"

"End _this_." The magic brakes, it shatters into a million pieces. It's not the eyes talking anymore. It's the ego, demanding for attention greedily, sneaking behind peace, stabbing it in the back to start a war out of nothing.

"End _what_?"

"Come with me."

"Oh, I see. It must be always about you. You or your dick. Well, I've had enough of both for tonight, thank you."

"I bet you haven't."

"You made the rules, I'm only adapting to them. Does it hurt being beaten in your own game? I warned you not to play with me. You've been sitting on your throne for far too long now, genuinely thinking that you're invincible."

"I am. Though I must say, you're the most impressive competitor I ever had. Very alluring, but be careful not to mix up the roles. It would be a shame if you'd confuse the hunter with the prey." His rudeness is outrageous, leaning down to her face to be on the same level, his pupils are dilated, engulfing Lorena into their blackness.

"Good night, Joe." The woman turns her back on him, walking away before the fury would take over and make her act without thinking, knowing exactly how much he burns to see her falling out of balance. But she's still perfectly in control, tip-toeing on the thin line without the slightest wobble. She used to be a ballerina, after all. If only he'd know the amount of energy she needs to sacrifice for the sake of keeping up the illusion.

What Lorena needs is the whiskey she poured for Joe, the one he left untouched, making it hopeless to get his taste from the glass. It's on the same spot he placed it, accompanied by something that wasn't there before.

Something black and lacy.

12. Mindset

****A/N:****

****All right, it's less than a week, isn't it? Let's get ready for season two with some steamy Jorena action, because there's no way I'm changing the plot.****

****Surferosa: Are you taking half the blame for the double sex scene? You should :P Lemme spoil you with this before round two begins! I hope it will touch you as much as it touched me... Sorry, not sorry! *mwah*****

****AnastasiaNoelle: I have plans for that bomb. Evil plans. It's starting to unfold right about now. I hope this one will be not less enjoyable than the rest and you'll have fun with it as well! ****

****BigBangTheory: Tell me you finished season one, it's worth is! I think this is the point where it gets really intense. Enjoy if you can!****

****celticrose00: Thank you for the compliment! Can't wait to reveal more about how much of equals they are, but until that, please take this chapter as a warm up!****

*** * ***

><p>Mindset

The night was long and filled with fever. The type that can't be cured with anything, it's not a physical symptom, it's generated by the mind. Though the lawyer stayed motionless, the room still felt like it was spinning, rocking her gently. The bed was too big. Even if she wasn't alone in it, it still remained empty. She wanted nothing more than to sleep but as soon as her eyelids closed the image of Joe appeared, haunted her thoughts like a nightmare that's

lurking in the dark, waiting for the perfect moment to step out of the shadows. The experience was too fresh, it was too close to let it pass on. His body heat still lingered around her as Lorena was lying awake, hoping for the morning to come or the feeling to fade. Whichever came sooner.

Her blood was boiling. After all this time, he still thought she was his property, attempted to drag her around just to show his father who's the man of the house. Of course, she stayed, how could she not? Though she wasn't expecting to find herself in a place where she might be questioning her own sanity.

She needed an outlet for those leftover energies more than anytime before, her brain was barely functioning and Joe knew it. He wasn't asking stupid questions when Lorena walked into the bedroom and tasted like whiskey. He wasn't asking stupid question when she did whatever she wanted with him, finding her way back to her normal state of mind, not being interested in who she was thinking about while moving sensually on top of him, or when she finally reached the point and the muscles in her body gave up the fight. The name she whispered was the same, and he stroked her back gently, knowing she was thinking about his son.

Lorena's showering for a good forty minutes, varying icy cold water with burning hot, letting it hit her body, washing away the remains of last night. She's a master of ignorance, she's been like this her whole life, having the key to overcome anything and everything that might complicate or unsettle a situation, making her the ultimate winner in every position. She's got a few more hours before heading back to Dallas a day earlier than the rest of the company, making sure nobody will try and engage in a dead conversation with her on their way home. She barely had three hours of sleep, and when she finally did, it was a dreamless coma, a strange blur. When she woke up, the man next to her was still in his sweetest dreams, having absolutely no idea about how much she envied him for that. The woman leaves small drops of water on the floor as she's walking out of the bathroom, the unmistakable smell of coffee slips through the bedroom door, putting a slight smile on her face.

Joe Sr.'s sitting at the far end of the long table, giving a quick look from above the newspaper as Lorena walks into the kitchen. Her heels are clicking on the marble floor. A steaming hot cup of coffee is already waiting for her, the cup is obviously bigger than the usual one. She raises an eyebrow when she's catching the difference.

"Rough night?"

"Rough night."

"Pour some whiskey into it to enhance the effect." He looks up at the woman next to him, waiting for her to sit down on his right. She smells into the mug, it's divine.

"It's not even seven in the morning, and I never drink alcohol before eight. That would be very unhealthy." She keeps a straight face but her eyes are smiling, lifting up the cup to clink it with the man's.

"Do you need a driver to the airport?"

"No, I don't. But if you want to talk about things I need, let me start with telling you how unnecessary it was." The little surprise she found last night, accurately placed next to the glass on the table, a lacy souvenir from his office.

"It was more of a question mark than a reproach."

"If you have questions, ask them."

To a certain extent, the relationship between them is perfect. The line that dissevers what's happening between the sheets, and what's happening outside of them is clear and straight. There's no need to play a role, and unlike his son, Joe knows how to be a professional. One of the reasons Lorena finds him not only tolerable but more of a worthy partner, someone who's grown up enough to see clearly. She never had to explain herself about anything, and she won't start it now, even if she's got the feeling that her panties wasn't the only thing that caught his eyes. He must have seen much more than that.

"I know Joe. He rarely ever chases the same dream for too long. And he rarely ever lets the control out of his hands. According to my observations, you're different in every aspect."

"In this case, I really hope you have observations about the lack of connection between you and him. Isn't it time to call off the war? He's an adult but he functions like a kid. And you still spoil him."

"He hates me regardless."

"I don't think it's true. His life would be empty without you. You, as the number one competitor."

"He's my son and I will always love him. There's not much I could do to make him believe this, still he deserves someone who cares about him."

"You're right, he's your son. And by that, you're the one responsible for him. Whatever hatred he has toward you, we both know you're fueling it."

* * *

><p>The air smells spicy and clean, almost static as the storm is getting nearer, painting the sky with a unique mixture of orange and dark violet. The distant sound of rumbling is like a persistent background music for the evening, sweltering and uncanny. There's no wind, nothing moves. Just the choky feeling of humidity and the anticipation for the rain to finally arrive and wash it away, soothing the anguished nerves.<p>

Lorena keeps on wishing for the cold, crispy New York drifts, the ones that don't torture citizens for hours before the swoop. It was useless opening the windows. However hard she hoped for some oxygen there was none to gather inside, but now they can't be left open if she doesn't want the whole house to get flooded by the approaching cloudburst.

Her head is about to explode. The hateful weather sensation keeps on playing wild tricks on her mind, on her body. The flashbacks from the last storm are similar to having lashes across her back, enhancing with every passing minute. The more she's resisting to remember, the more she fails. The vision of Joe, their gaze locked as he moved on the bed, towering above Cameron's naked body. His voice inside of her head dragging the lawyer deeper into something she never needed and never wanted. Now the thought itself is enough to make her moisten, slowly but surely driving her crazy.

The sky is quickly growing darker as the rumble intensifies, still without a sign of a single raindrop. The knocking sounds unreal, just like a mere hallucination, like it's coming from the other side of the world. It happens again and again until it becomes obvious that it's reality. Lorena's definitely not in the mood for guests or people in particular. Her only hope would be to find her long missed conscious on the doorstep, waiting impatiently for admittance. Unfortunately, her conscious rarely ever wears a suit and tie and calls itself Joe MacMillan. Yet, it's the exact sight she finds there, causing her to use the same momentum she opened the door with to shut it close, but it's already too late to evade the inevitable. Joe holds his hand out, stopping the heavy wood halfway from his face, his eyes all over the woman. He barely had the chance to get a glimpse at the mint colored, flowery dress back in the office before she disappeared and he found nothing but cold and emptiness in her room.

"You're aware of trespassing being a felony, right?" The lawyer inhales sharply, blocking the entrance with her own body.

"Cardiff felt like a desert without your sarcasm today. I wonder where you've been."

"Did you miss me? How touching, though somewhat strange. As far as I remember I informed your secretary about my probable absence while you were, let me quote her _'extremely busy'_ in your office. Talking about which, nobody is deaf. So just as a quick, constructive critic: maybe next time you should try and put your hand on Cameron's mouth. I mean, I understand if it's itchy but nobody else is interested." Unlike within normal conditions, her mouth is faster than her brain, talking without thinking her words over. Half a sentence can be more than enough for Joe to get the wrong impression, making things up in his head, convincing himself that she might care.

"If I would've known it bothers you this much, I'd put a lot more effort into it."

"Why are you here, Joe? Did you mix up my address with someone else's? It's not too late to correct it, just make sure you ride faster than the storm."

"You're not inviting me in?"

"Absolutely not."

The weather has different plans, playing a nasty game with them as the light starts vibrating before a final flinch as the electricity goes out completely, leaving them standing in the semi-dark. Joe pushes the door in without the smallest difficulty, sneaking inside of the house despite the expression on the woman's face, bending down

to her ears so she can hear him closer.

"I hope you have candles for emergencies."

"You've got to be kidding me." Lorena slams the door loudly, staring at the man, standing face to face with the last person she wants to have around. He's holding the gaze, remaining by the stairs motionless. It's almost believable that he's waiting for an actual invite, a word of acceptance. But in reality, he's enjoying every second of the sudden change of state, the unexplainable waves coming from the lawyer, the way she's trying to figure out what to do. She's been cornered at her own palace, after all. "Follow me."

She can feel Joe's eyes on herself as she's leading the way into the kitchen. Like a gazelle that's about to cross the savannah, pursued by the hungry look of a lion.

"I'd get myself a ladder but since you're here, how about making yourself useful?" She points at a box on top of the kitchen cabinet. The man couldn't care less about the direction, he's focused on nothing but Lorena. "You can stop this, Joe, it's completely useless. The only thing you'll make me do is to grab you by the neck and throw you the hell out. Understood?" He smiles at her in awe, it's incredible how convincing she can be when it's about control, but she's unaware of the heat that's radiating from her.

The man drops his jacket on the closest bar stool, unbuttoning his sleeves before rolling them up to his elbows. He barely needs to stretch himself out in order to reach the white box, placing it next to the woman.

"Here you go."

She gives him a dark look before returning to rummage the drawers. There's nothing she could say without getting herself in trouble, so she remains silent instead. From the corner of her eyes, she can see Joe holding up a lighter with two fingers, holding it out for her. She grabs it along with the box and leaves the man behind, placing tea lights everywhere. The small flames are giving the place a strange, almost enchanted atmosphere, as they're tracing the way from the main entry to the kitchen and the living room, reflecting from the walls. It's already dark outside, the orange has disappeared from the sky, only the velvety blackness remains, stroking the ground with its smoothness, deepening the already considerable tension inside. The return of the electricity is overdue, it will most likely not even happen before dawn, considering the darkness all over the street.

It's been more than three weeks now since Debbie's engagement. And it's been more than three weeks since their unforgettable affair back in New York. They haven't mentioned it, haven't shared a single word about what happened between them. Only those little, stolen looks remained from that night. And the hunger. Joe couldn't bow to the way Lorena refused him, denied to follow, staying with his father instead after what they've shared. The memories of her touch, her taste, her lips around him, but never on his mouth. Torturing his senses with fractions of visions that seem like they weren't even true. It's been too long. She's walking around the house in a dress that leaves her shoulders and back uncovered, bare feet. Of course, she's not running away. Where would she go? Glasses clinking in her hands and a bottle

of ros  as she's walking towards the man.

"How many do you have on hand?"

"Enough for tonight. You know, Joe, what I want right now is good company and I don't consider you someone like that. So why not making a trio out of our duo with this nice, tasty, beautiful liquid? It's from Italy, you should taste it." The lawyer turns her back on him, attempting to open the bottle. She's obviously an expert, it takes her thirteen seconds to accomplish the task, pouring the wine generously into one of the glasses, hovering above the other one. "Don't get me wrong, I wasn't growing up in a cave, but unreliability being your natural state, I'm not sure if I should push it even further."

"Are you afraid?"

"You know, my mother gave me the most valuable wisdom about life a very long time ago. She said, never trust a man who's got a dick between his legs. See my problem here, Joe? Answering your question, no. I'm not afraid."

What the lawyer needs is an acceptable amount of alcohol to stay in her right mind until the storm finally passes and she can overcome the urge she has, repressing it as much as physically possible, but as long as Joe is near her, it's everything but easy to put through. She knows how much the man is waiting for a weak moment. And when there might be one he's got the ability to sniff it out and attack right away without hesitation.

Lorena sits down in front of Joe on the other side of the counter. The farthest spot she can take, sensing how much it irritates him.

"I ask you one more time, why are you here? Don't you lie to me." She takes a sip of the wine, not breaking eye-contact with the man. The lawyer can tell about the millions of thoughts running through his head by the expression on his face. Being honest is a hard job for a compulsive liar, and that's what he is. He can feed anybody around him with those little white lies, always the right words at the right time. They're unsuspecting because they want to believe him. His charm is the most dangerous weapon in his hands. The only person he can't fool is Lorena. She sees through him like he was made out of glass, making him raging with wrath every single time. She's unlike anybody else. More precisely, she's just like him.

"I was waiting. I was patient. You haven't called." His words catch the woman by surprise, they sound truer than anything she was expecting to hear. This time, he managed to truly over-comply his duty. She shrugs, the little smirk appears on her lips.

"I'm not your whore." She's definitely not. But her neck keeps on calling for his fingers to be curled around it for that tremendous ignorance she's showing toward him. She hasn't got a clue about his nights, lying awake, paralyzed by the fury that's overtaking his body and mind for her to not show up, not curl against him while her fingers are wandering all over his skin. She should've started begging a long time ago. She has to give up and give in. He never needed anything like this before.

"Lorena, I warn you, this is not a game." He sounds hostile, it's amazing how much he had learned about the power of tone since their first meeting, he's been a good student of the lawyer's even if he doesn't know about it.

"Are you threatening me, Joe? This is a barren argument. There's nothing to talk about. Excuse me for thinking that you were adult enough."

"You should've come with me." The woman slams her glass on the counter, it's a mystery how it stays in one piece. She's breathing fire.

"Shut up. Just shut up. Who the fuck do you think you are? It might sound surprising to you, but you have zero role in my life. Get it? None! I don't need you, I don't want you! You can save all this bullshit for someone else who might care."

Lorena gets up from her seat, walking to the window, staring out at the night. The treetops are moving in the distance, it's about time for the storm to finally arrive. The sky flashes with a purple light, the sound that follows makes her flinch. Joe walks behind the woman, not too close but just enough to let her feel him sensibly hardening. His thumbs easily brushing the side of her hands as she's pressing her palms onto the counter. Lorena needs to focus. She has to prevent her body from reacting to his nearness, keeping her posture straight and still instead of arching her back against the man, getting an impression of every inch of him like she'd want to. Her eyes are closed tightly, waiting for Joe to say something, to break the silence and give the momentum she needs to walk out of the situation, but he remains silent. His breathing is slow and deep, burning the skin on the woman's neck.

The lawyer's threatened to be defeated by her own weapon. It was a mistake believing that the hunger could be eased by a shallow recourse when all it did was making it worse, heaving close to the unbearable. It's too late to take it back now. Too late to undo that wave of raw, primal fervor that still lingers around her, the need for that ultimate satisfaction. She won't let Joe make her back down, she's not willing to give the control out of her hands. Lorena has to stick to her method in order to successfully suppress the natural instinct when it comes to him. Only two things to avoid for the sake of her self-control. The contact of their bare skin against each other and their lips.

Joe can feel the hesitation and it's promising him a chance. She can say whatever she wants to, but her body keeps on telling the opposite and this wicked dichotomy is more than appealing. He places a tender kiss on the nape of her neck, slowly tracing the outline of her jaw with his lips, waiting impatiently for the woman's reaction. A single sign of surrender. Lorena inhales deeply, turning her head to the side. A moan of desire scratching her throat but she can't give into it. Her whisper is clean and loud in the silence.

"_Go home, Joe._" His movement stops abruptly. The tension reflecting from the man is perceptible, almost like an electric discharge. He takes a step back, his body is already freezing without her closeness. He's ready for her to turn around and start an argument, her passion for showing but she's resisting the urge to school him. His fists are clenched, avoiding to break the first thing he could

grab.

The lawyer waits for Joe to walk out of the kitchen, leaving her alone with that brain melting agony and the blaze in her core. She can't move, it's like her muscles turned into stone. The purple light paints the walls in a new color for a second.

Lorena can't help the strange, static feeling, letting it lead her out to the hall. The draft of her steps stir up the small flames of the candles, recoiling by the shadow at the entrance. Her eyes are barely used to the darkness after the lightning.

Joe's leaning against the door frame with his palms on both sides, his forehead pressed against the cold surface. He makes a half turn to face the woman with an unreadable expression, eyes gleaming with a dark sparkle, pushing himself away from the door and aiming for the woman with his colossal steps. She hasn't got a chance to comprehend his presence, taking her by surprise as his hands seize around her waist, bending down before dropping her over the shoulder like she was weightless. The woman would react if she could. But the unexpected action leaves her breathless.

She's dropped on the couch in her living room, her landing is moderately careful though the soft, fluffy army of cushions subdue most of her free fall. She's staring at Joe with wide eyes. He's towering above her, his face is agitated and raving at the same time. He's leaning down to the lawyer, arms placed next to her shoulders on both sides, their faces only inches away.

"I'm not going anywhere until we've had enough."

"I've had enough." She sounds a lot more uncertain than she would want to, feeling like she'd been driven into a corner and chances are, she won't find a way to break out.

"Have you?" The little half smile on the man's face is nothing but irony, quickly fading away. "It's terrible craving you like this. I hate every minute of it. Tell me, Lorena, do you crave my touch as much as I crave yours?"

"Get out of my house, Joe."

"Look at me." He turns her head back by a touch on her chin, reading the answer from her eyes since she's refusing to say it out loud. His palms slowly sliding up from her knees, going under the dress. She stops him with a strong hold on his wrists, pushing him away so she can stand up.

"I'm endlessly annoyed by the way you try to intimidate me. I wish I'd started a journal the first day we met. I could've written down all the adjectives that come to my mind when I think about you and so I could share which one is about to be the winner. I'm pretty sure it would be a tie between pathetic and infantile." She gets more and more warmed up by anger, her cheeks flushed, lips swollen. Joe takes her place on the couch, devouring her whole presence. She's a walking, talking time bomb and it's not hard to tell that she's about to explode.

The lawyer steps closer to Joe, pulling his head back tightly by his hair. They're even now. He wasn't counting on the move, now it's his

turn to be taken by surprise. Lorena bends down to him, touching his forehead to hers, breathing against his lips with closed eyes. She's grabbed by her elbows as he kisses her softly. The long awaited sensation makes him moan. All of those long months without her taste, the nights and days. He's biting on her lower lip to make her open her mouth, sneaking in with his tongue, wanting more and more. The woman pulls his head back even more to break the kiss, leaving him panting. She shakes her head slightly. It's far too late for her, she's already lost.

Her hands move quickly at his shirt, stroking it off of his shoulder, biting on her lip by the feeling of his skin. She's tasting him from inch to inch, captivated by his deep groans as his hands never stop wandering on her body. Lorena grabs his belt, using a bit more force than necessary while unbuckling it, getting rid of his pants, throwing it away with a wide move. She takes a few steps back, sitting on the coffee table, indulging herself to the sight. Joe stretches out a hand and for his biggest surprise, she's taking it right away. Her back is facing him when she's sitting on his lap, feeling his exaltation. He unzips the dress, nibbling on her shoulder blades and neck, her head dropped back on his shoulder. The sweet sound of her sighs turns him on even more. Her hips drawing circles slowly, sensually.

"What are you doing to me?" His boxers won't be able to hold him back for too long.

The lawyer stands up to face Joe, letting the dress fall onto the thick, feathery carpet, revealing that she's wearing nothing but white silk panties underneath. The man swallows with excitement, thinking about her running around the office, barely having anything on, still looking classier than most of the female population on the planet. He tugs her closer so she's within reach for not only his hands but also for his mouth, holding onto her round buttocks tightly while outlining the lingerie with his tongue. She's holding onto his hair, sinking her fingers into it. The small piece of fabric follows the dress onto the floor. He inhales sharply while his thumb brushes against her core, getting a clear notion of how much of a liar she is. She's soaked with desire, even though she doesn't need nor want Joe.

"We'll talk about it later..."

Lorena moans loudly. The long, unhurried lick sends an electric shock to her spine, barely being able to stay on her feet. She grabs his throat with one hand, lowering herself down for a kiss. His taste is even more enjoyable while combined with hers. She makes sure to undress him completely before kneeling above his lap, relishing in the feeling of being able to look down at him, even if there's only a few inches difference between their heads. Joe can't keep himself away from her now that she's this close, having his hands running up and down on her, grabbing everything he can. Her breasts matching perfectly in his palms as he's caressing them, sucking on the nipples. He keeps on going back to check the level of her wetness, moaning with pleasure every time.

The lawyer lowers herself, grinding on him, teasing him mercilessly before letting him slowly slide inside, adjusting to the size as he's filling her entirely. She feels like she was designed for him, wrapping him tightly inside. Her whisper makes the little hairs stand

up on the man's back as Lorena starts to move.

"Were you craving this, Joe?" He can't reply, it's physically impossible. His head is dropped back, not being able to find his voice yet. The reflection of the candlelight plays on their bodies, painting a halo of fire on their skin.

"... Lorena..." The way he sighs her name is more than exciting, making her even more delirious. She keeps on deepening the moves, intensifying the pace while straddling him. Stopping every once in a while to relish in his full extent, driving him insane with the way her hips move. Back and forth, up and down. Slow circles and eights, putting his body up to the test. She leans back with her hands on his knees, riding him faster and faster as she can feel the sensation of her upcoming climax. Joe can sense her getting nearer to the point, enhancing the experience with his fingers on the right spot. It doesn't take long before Lorena's moaning his name as the final waves of pleasure are washing over her. The lawyer's body tenses up, arching her back with ecstasy. The moment her muscles start convulsing around him he's unable to hold himself back, throbbing, pulsating together with her.

Their bodies are gleaming with sweat, arms wrapped around each other tightly as the fever calms down, breathing heavily onto each other's neck. The rain is pouring outside, hitting the windows. The sky flashes with painfully sharp lights before every thunder. And with every thunder, Lorena tenses up, holding onto Joe a little more. She can hear him giggle softly into her ear.

"All that bloodthirst, Ms. Maze."

"Don't you dare laughing at me, Joe." He strokes her jaw with his lips, placing a small kiss on her earlobe. He can't fondle her for long. The woman's getting on her feet, standing before the man naked, still glowing with pleasure. He's already missing her heat. "Just to make it clear, I hope you know you'll be sleeping right here on the couch. I'm not going to argue about it wi..." The loud noise of the thunder fills the house, causing the woman to swallow the rest of her sentence, standing petrified with fear. "It was close, wasn't it?"

"Not going to argue about it with me?" He's raising his eyebrows, looking at the lawyer with his head tilted to the side, it couldn't be more obvious that he's having fun. "Yes, it was close."

"You're not sleeping naked in my bed." She's furious but she can't blame Joe this time. It's all her fault or if not, it's the storm's. Either way, she's got no other choice than keeping the man around. He can't imagine what's going on inside of her, being terrified by such weather like this since she was nine. She's traumatized ever since. Her way of handling storms is basically keeping all the lights on while curling up in the biggest armchair in her possession, all through the night. Problem number one: there is no electricity.

She's blowing the candles on her way to the stairs, accompanied by Joe. She's anything but happy about the situation. Joe should've never got admittance into her bedroom. Especially not into her bed. He doesn't belong there and he never will. Instead of finally pushing him further away, now he's about to spend the night with her and

probably later on be a complete bitch about it.

* * *

><p>Lorena's trying to keep a healthy distance between herself and Joe. She's still not okay with accepting that she just gave him a handful of reasons to be an asshole with her, walking around the office with an ego that's barely fitting into his own room at its natural state.<p>

The storm doesn't want to pass on. It's raging. The rain is so heavy, it's almost like somebody's hitting the glass surfaces with a baseball bat. If only the rumbling would subside. But it's still frequent, leaving the lawyer shaking inside. She's tortured by a very loud one, it could've struck right next to her home according to its sound. Joe touches her shoulder, though she thought he was long asleep, sliding close to her. She turns around, snuggling up against his chest, merging into his body heat. She's wrapped in his arms just like that night at COMDEX and she swallows to keep herself from crying when the thought hits her. The biggest mistake she ever made repeated once again. Phenomenal.

Her face is buried into the curve of his neck. Their breathing slowly harmonize and she couldn't be more thankful for him for keeping his mouth shut. His hands stroking her back. Knowing Joe, it's hard to tell if he's doing it on a soothing purpose or because he wants something else, either way, Lorena is grateful for the care and if his boxers would somehow disappear, she wouldn't hesitate to kick him off the bed.

She's half asleep, unable to open her eyes anymore, but her brain still wonders. The trembling she felt has disappeared, there's barely anything she can feel but warmth. Warmth and safety all around.

* * *

><p>He's listening to her breathing, the small noises she makes while dreaming. Whatever she sees, it must be pleasant. He won't miss the opportunity to ask her about it once she's awake. In fact, he would wake her up. He would attempt to provoke the sleeping lion and kiss the covers off of her body, getting her out of that white vest and shorts. He would hold her in his arms until she wakes up, being the first thing she sees and feels in the morning. But he can't. He was waiting for a chance like this for so long and the urge to take a look around in her realm is more than compelling. He needs to get a peek behind the curtains. He knows nothing about Lorena and it's something he can't take anymore. She's a mystery, keeping every fraction of information away from him. Except for that one.

Joe slips out of the bed, looking around in the bedroom. It's gorgeous, of course. What else it could be from someone with such a sophisticated taste. The neighborhood itself is posh. She belongs in an exclusive environment, clearly similar to the one she was raised in. He takes a look at the woman. She's sleeping like a baby.

He walks around the house, searching for pieces of Lorena everywhere. He takes a look in the fridge for the sake of his curiosity and despite his doubts, it seems like she really does cook. Joe doesn't

even bother with suppressing a grin, it's clearly the biggest surprise he wasn't expecting to find. She wasn't kidding about her passion for wine, though. The door next to the kitchen takes him into her own, miniature wine cellar, stacked with bottles. Something tells him that the wines only worth more than his car and he's driving a Porsche. He exhales deeply when stepping into the living room, his eyes automatically searching for the spot on the couch where they collapsed into each other last night. It's so vivid in his head, his body reacts to the memory right away. He's ready to have her right there in her bed, first thing in the morning.

He walks up the stairs back into the bedroom, finding her still in her dreams. A box catches his eyes. It's in the lower part of a round, tiny coffee table, standing in front of a huge armchair, covered in a beige colored, fluffy blanket. Joe takes the box out, placing it on the table gently. It's wooden, perfectly carved. The flowers around it couldn't look more realistic. There's a strange feeling in his guts, the excitement of a kid who thinks he found a treasure map.

* * *

><p>By the time Lorena gets back from the guest bathroom, the door is opened to her own one. She woke up without Joe, but as much as she was hoping for him to sneak away without a word, he's not only stayed but took the very first opportunity to drive the woman up the wall. She was home, after all. The chilly shower downstairs and the gigantic cup of coffee helps her somewhat balance out the murderous mood she was put into by the man.<p>

She's leaning against the door frame, her lips stop midway to her mug. It's not so much that Joe's standing in front of the mirror, damp from head to toe, his lower body wrapped in a white towel. It's the way he's holding her tiny pink razor and shaving his face with it.

"I'm speechless..."

"Good morning, sunshine." He's grinning as much as the activity he engages in lets him to. His eyes wonder from his own reflection to Lorena. The grin melts away from his face rapidly, seeing her standing there in black lingerie with his shirt on top of it.

"You know I'm using it elsewhere, right?" His smile appears again, looking back in the mirror.

"Oh, I do. I noticed."

"I'm amazed by the way you seem to be aware of all the small details." Her tone is pure sarcasm, but to her honest surprise, she's still having fun. It's unbelievable how sassy the man is, not even mentioning the forest fruit scented shaving cream he's having all over his face. The lawyer takes a sip from her coffee to avoid laughing. The mug catches his eyes, turning it slightly toward him so he can read the writing on it.

"_Blood of my enemies_? Sounds fitting."

"I'm not sure if you're complimenting or insulting with this."

Lorena's shamelessly enjoying the view, the more she's watching, the slower the progress gets for him. He's not able to ignore her presence. Her eyes are all over him, burning his skin and she's curious about every little reaction. And there is a very obvious one, building a tent at his pelvic area under the towel, making her giggle naughtily.

"For me?"

"For you." Joe puts the pink razor on the side of the sink, taking the mug out of the woman's hands with a quick move and casually dropping it into the shower, listening as it shatters into a million pieces. He lifts Lorena up, pushing her against the wall, her legs wrapped around his waist.

"That was my favorite one. I will make your life miserable for this, Joe." Her hands stroking the remains of the shaving cream off his face, bending down to the curve of his neck, sniffing him lightly. "Have you showered with my girly stuff? You smell like cotton candy. Do you need anything else? Should I lend you a dress? Panties, maybe?"

"Good idea, I want this one."

"It's already occupied, I'm afraid."

"Don't make bets on it." He carries the lawyer out of the bathroom, dropping her on the bed. She's too surprised to think about an acceptable reaction and her panties are sliding down with the speed of light. "See? Unoccupied."

He kneels before the bed, pulling her closer by her ankles.

"Remember when you told me you love making me hard? I love making you wet." She's unable to hold back a shout when his lips meet her tender flesh. He's not teasing her, not making her wait. He's about to make her his and nobody else's, aching to hear her tasting his name between screams and moans, to feel her quiver from the inside. He's french kissing her sweetest spot, making her arching her back in pleasure, her feet on his back, her hands grabbing tightly on his hair. He knows she wants more but he won't give it to her, at least not the way she's demanding it. Joe drops the towel away, leaning on top of Lorena, sliding inside of her wetness right away. They moan into each other's mouth as she's squirming under his heavy body. Her nails digging deeper into his skin with every thrust, exhaling his name onto his neck.

"I want you to feel me all day..."

He kneels between the woman's legs, holding her as close as he can while taking her extra slowly. His moves are equivalent to a torture. A slow, sensual torture.

"...Joe... Joe... please... Joe..." Her begging is music to his ears though he's still not enhancing the speed. He goes all the way inside, letting her get an impression of his full extent before pulling himself out with the same, unhurried pace, pushing the limits of what her body can take.

"...don't you ever tell me you're not craving my touch, Lorena..." She looks flawless under him, every inch of her body is a piece of art, he can't get enough of the sight. He could go on like this forever, but he wants to grant her wish. And he knows he will be gone with her, it's amazing what an impact her body has on his own. Her pleasure is his pleasure.

He leans on his arms, bending down to her face to reach her lips. As soon as her tongue penetrates his mouth, his hips speed up, sensing her walls getting tighter. The veins in his neck are heaving as they're reaching the final thrust, staring into each other's eyes, fingers entwined. He's collapsing onto her chest, listening to her panting, not letting go of her hands, her warmth.

She doesn't know what he's feeling, she can't even imagine the rage inside of him, how much he needs her and wants her. She doesn't know he found it. She doesn't know what it does to him. He's suffocating by his own jealousy.

13. Handle With Care

****Handle with care****

The whiskey turns bitter on his tongue, burning his throat as he swallows it, leaving a dark, painful lump in his stomach. It's not the golden liquid's fault. Even honey would taste sour. If only Joe had the power to manipulate time the way he does manipulate people. It's too late to think about what ifs. And it's also too late thinking about regret.

He took it from her. He had to, there wasn't any other choice. His insides were weltering like the waves of the ocean during a deadly storm since the moment he found it in that wooden box, hidden like some kind of a sacred item. He was hoping for answers to all of the questions he had. But now that it's laying on his desk, he can barely look at it from a distance. Joe's leaning against the door frame, keeping a safe space for himself, pouring another round of the strong beverage. The courage he needs must be there somewhere, hidden between the millions of thoughts that are mercilessly running through his head, torturing his senses. There's no line to separate reality and imagination anymore. His clothes don't feel comfortable, he'd get out of his own skin if he could.

The man's slowly approaching the table, holding the glass with two fingers, sweeping the hair out of his face with the other hand. He should be wasted by now, yet he's never been more sober in his life. What he's drunk on has nothing to do with alcohol.

The last drop of whiskey disappears from the cup, causing Joe to change his mind before sitting down, walking back with long steps to grab the bottle by the neck, bringing it along with him. Once he takes the photo in his hands, his eyes are glued onto it, unable to look away, making his skin crawl. It's him. The image of the enemy that used to be faceless is slowly burning into his mind, not even the smallest details can escape his notice. The beast is breathing fire inside Joe's lungs. He's not in control over his own thoughts anymore. The more he stares at Luke, the less tolerable his visions are becoming. Lorena's presence is written all over the dark haired

man, Joe can't fool himself about it. She was raised to know what's good. Her taste is sophisticated in everything from wine to men. A rival that's worthy to be feared of. However, it's not the physical appearance that hurts him the most. It has nothing to do with it. It's not even the way their hips touch or how she's clinging to his arm with both hands. It's all about the way they look at each other. The chemistry and the intensity of passion between them could set a house on fire. It could have set their bed on fire. Luke's glaring at her lips, slightly parted, swollen with desire and Joe has the same electric shock running down his spine that he must have felt while thinking about her sweet taste and how much of a dancer her tongue is, her little nibbles on the lips while kissing.

There's no blood in his veins. It's liquid jealousy that's circling around in his body, feeding him with images of lust and devotion, all of the admiration he's been missing out on while somebody else had it. And now she's refusing to give him the same things. She doesn't look at him the way she did with Luke.

She has to be reminded of the facts: Luke is past tense. Joe is present. And he can't be satisfied with only pieces of the lawyer, he needs more. He wants all of Lorena. The black haired man is in his focus again, drowning in the waves of his own rage.

"... give her to me..."

His plan is made out of nothing but resentment and hatred, completely lacking consciousness or tact. He's still taking the risk. The only way to make Lorena cooperate is to drive her into a corner, and provoke the answers out of her.

* * *

><p>The most important task of the day has been executed and it's a serious success. It couldn't be anything else since Lorena doesn't know how to lose and her effort paid out just like it was supposed to be. The extra trip has worth every mile, making her walk out with more than what she was originally asking for. And she was asking for a lot.<p>

Joe hasn't brought up her little incident with the chairman of Reynolds&Co since it happened a few months ago, surprising Lorena on the most unexpected way, since she was ready to be bullied and forced to be listening to the story of his route to glory over and over again. Yet, he hasn't mentioned it, not even once. Unlike Gordon, who still couldn't move on. Whining about the money Cardiff lost because of her has become a repeating number, his favorite topic to feel miserable about instead of searching for a new potential partner. The conversation about it hit rock-bottom when he stated that he should have gone with Joe instead of the woman. Her tone was disinterested and cold while telling him that the money would be gone anyways since they would have been all bored to death in his presence.

Even if it was left unsaid, she owed the money to Joe. As much as she hated to admit it, it was true and made her feel defenseless in a situation that wasn't under her control, struggling to get even with the man. She called her father, asking for one name from his acquaintanceship. Just one. She needed a single option to go for what she wanted and she hit the jackpot with it. The moment she arrived to see Jacob Wheeler, she knew he was already informed about the facts.

The decade-old friendship he shares with Paul Maze allowed him to be more welcoming about a matter like this, and though he was warned not to treat Lorena like a little girl, he did just that. His intentions to intimidate the lawyer in order to see where her limits are got put down very quickly. Way quicker than he expected. The way she said the numbers without even blinking made him chuckle with respect and when he jokingly asked her why not double it, she responded without hesitation.

The soothing warmth of relief is taking over the woman's nerves as she steps out of the elevator, making her way to her office. She's not willing to wait until tomorrow to finalize the agreement. Cardiff might need the money but the real reason behind it is her own wish to equalize her dues, getting out of the unpleasant position as fast as she can. If the paperwork needs to be done right now to get there, she's up for it.

It all takes less than a second. As soon as the door closes and Lorena takes a step toward the table, her eyes are catching it. Her brain needs more time to process the information, because clearly, what she sees can't be true. The muscles in her body turn into liquid, making it hard for her to put one foot in front of the other, leaning against the wall with one hand, covering her mouth in shock with the other.

"... no..."

* * *

><p>The lawyer's not reasoning with Joe's secretary. She's simply by-passing her, ripping the door open to the man's office, finding it empty and deserted. How typical of him to make the most disgusting move he possibly could but not having the guts to assist it through. The perfect description of a coward.<p>

"Call him, find him, I don't care where he is. Get that fucker back here right now!" Lorena slams the door behind herself, sitting down on the leather couch. She can't think. She's physically unable to do that.

The secretary appears at the door, informing her quietly that _Mr. MacMillan_ is not planning on returning today, not even for the sake of _Ms. Maze_. Lorena can't make herself look at the woman, just nods lightly instead, signaling that she heard every word, waving with a hand to gesture that she hasn't got any more orders, she shall go. Fast.

Joe has no idea what that picture represents. It's a part of her. A fragment of a dream, something sacred that she was keeping more dearly than anything she ever had. And it's been ruined. The magic died the very moment he touched it. The thought brings tears to her eyes. It was hidden and treasured, only for her eyes to see. Only for her hands to touch. Some days, when all she needed was a familiar voice, an ear to listen, a friend to hold, she outlined his frame gently with a fingertip, almost being able to recall the way he sounded. But however hard she tried, it kept on fading out of her memory, feeling the weight of guilt growing bigger inside. It's not that she can't go on. She just decided not to, somewhere deep down inside. She tied the burden to her own feet before jumping into the ocean, of her own free will. Letting it pull her deeper, suffocated

by remorse. Her atonement.

She's still sitting motionless, her muscles paralyzed, eyes fixed on the photo. It looks the same as it always did, yet her stomach turns while thinking about Joe's grip tainting the delicate material, his gaze all over it. She could never wash that off. The image turns kaleidoscopic and she wipes off the tears with the back of her hand, knowing it will never be the same again. Her face is convulsed with agony while destroying a piece of her heart. The tiny little parts falling onto the ground like they never meant anything. Like it was nothing but a piece of paper. Luke.

The icy grip in her throat grows tighter and tighter as the waves of reminiscence are washing over her, all translated into such physical pain that she must cover her own mouth to suppress the scream that's about to find it's way out. It's all too surreal to be true, still the grief proves it otherwise. It is reality. Lorena's brain switches into automatic pilot mode, a self-defensive mechanism to avoid the breakdown. Taking her shoes off before getting up from the couch, standing on her own ravaged fairy tale. The monster inside of her is roaring, starving and the only thing it can be satiated with is ravage. She looks around his office, but there isn't a single thought in her mind. It's empty, just like her heart. For the lawyer's biggest surprise her body doesn't even need an instruction to be driven by. With a slow move, she sweeps Joe's desk clean from whatever he had on it. If only he would still have that baseball bat. Not like it matters, she can do it all with her bare hands. The sound of crystal glasses shattering on the wall, one after another. The beast howls louder by the more damage she makes, smashing whatever she can get her hands on. She's not in control over her own limbs anymore. Everything feels weightless. Everything, but her wrath.

She doesn't care about the expression of Joe's good for nothing secretary while acknowledging her from the corner of her eyes before she's running away, nor does she care about Bosworth calling her name who knows how many times before stepping behind her, locking his hands around the woman's wrists tightly until she finally gives up the fight. She's dragging her look around the room, terrified by the sight, all the mess she made.

John takes a deep breath, gently turning Lorena around so he can have a good look at her. Though he opens his mouth, there's no point of asking the question. The answer is all around, covering the floor and he's treading on it. His fingers sweep the hair out of the lawyer's face, desperately trying to read her. She's shaking. The hesitation is more than obvious but he easily spans it with half a step, arms softly folding around the woman. She's flinching by the contact but still accepting it, doing something she hasn't done in a very long time. Hugging someone for the sake of support, for the warmth of a simple gesture. A place she can hide from herself. All of the tears she was holding back for years are coming out now, they're flooding like rain. Like a storm that destroyed everything.

* * *

><p>Disbelief is written all over Joe's face as he opens the door. The sight makes him question reality. Not in his wildest dreams dared he wish for a visitation from the lawyer, yet she's standing on the doorstep at this very moment, quietly waiting for an invite. He's hesitating and it's not because her presence is unwanted.<p>

In fact, he was suffering throughout the last few days by the way she distanced herself, ignored him more than ever before. Divested him of even the smallest stolen look. Bosworth made sure to cross Joe's plan and made it impossible for him to move into the office next to hers until his own one gets fully renovated after she was wreaking havoc inside.

He's hesitating because he's terrified of what the woman has to say. He's fully aware of how far he went with it, the idea itself was cursed. He still put it through without thinking about consequences, blinded by his own pain, disregarding the wounds that have been ripped open by a single move of a hand. If only he'd be sorry.

Joe steps away from the door, signaling that her access is granted, following her with his eyes as she makes her way into the living room. The inevitable heels clicking on the floor. She looks stunning in that midnight black dress, hugging her body so tightly it's almost like a second layer of skin. Her skin. Silky and fragrant, leaving him with a permanent yearning to feel it brushing against his lips, his palms, his body. Joe's thoughts are running wild, relishing in the memory of the last time Lorena showed up at his apartment. He thought it was impossible for her to be more irresistible but she proved him wrong a million times ever since. Here she is with an unreadable expression on her face, waiting for him to follow her footsteps, and instead of wasting precious time, he should just step behind her, making her move with the same rhythm as his hips move, feeling her quiver around him in the sweetest moments of pleasure as she's whispering his name, moaning it right into his mouth, filling him with life again.

Running away is not an option for neither of them. There's only one way to solve the situation, and it's going right through it. Their hands slightly touch when Joe passes next to the woman, stepping to the table, lowering himself to sit on the edge, arms folded on his chest. Lorena hasn't even opened her mouth, yet he's already in a defensive position, ready to bring the most inappropriate questions into the conversation if he has to. The point he's missing is the most important one. Right here and right now he can't stand a chance. He's predestined to lose.

The lawyer's keeping him waiting for a reason. She's got a remarkable poker face, making it impossible for the man to figure out not only when the bomb is about to detonate but also, the type of explosive she'll be using, and she's taking her time eyeing him as long as she can. Lorena's facing the hardest part, finding her voice. She can't lose her mind, can't back down but most importantly, can't have mercy. She's sorting her thoughts out, knowing that some of the words she wants to say will get lost between the lines and some of the words she doesn't want to say will do exactly what they're supposed to. Damage.

"This is not entirely your fault, Joe. I should have known you by now. I should have known that you will use something I love against me." They're barely three steps away from each other, engaging in the most intense staring contest they've ever had. Unlike the rest, it does bear a meaning.

A muscle twitches in the man's face, it's almost unnoticeable but not for Lorena. Joe inhales deeply. He's tensed from head to toe,

stabbing his gaze into the woman's eyes.

"Something or the only thing?" The silence deepens, but he needs to know the truth. The same question that was burning him on the inside, though he could have never made himself bringing it up for her, frightened by the idea of what the reply may be. He couldn't keep it inside anymore. "Answer me."

"No. You're not asking, Joe. You don't know how to do it. You interrogate. Besides, I owe you nothing."

"You're right, you owe me nothing. You owe it to yourself."

"After all this time, do you really think you can manipulate me? You think you can blackmail me into your disgusting little game? I'm sick of you. Don't you talk to me about love. You don't know anything about love. You don't know what it is." She can hide the lump in her throat and she can keep her voice steady, still she can't fight the watery glimmer in her eyes, causing the woman to clench her fists in protest. Joe makes a light, faltering move toward Lorena but her reaction is reluctant. She couldn't reject him more obviously.

"I can't say what you want to hear." The crinkle between his eyebrows deepens, his face plays in a bizarre mixture of emotions. The pain that's slowly pulsating inside of his chest could only be soothed by her warmth but the illusion of belonging is dying right in front of his eyes.

"I would ask you why you did it, but the last thing I need is another lie. I have nothing to give you. And you certainly have nothing to give me. We're both takers, incompatible on every level." Despite all of her endeavor, silent tears are running down her cheeks, drawing a line of shame across her face, wiping them off quickly with her fingers. "It's all right, Joe. I forgive you. But I will never ever trust you again."

"Have you ever trusted me at all?" He's standing dumbfounded on the same spot, ready to break something.

"I've made many mistakes in my life. It's not the first one."

"There's only one person on this planet I hate more than I hate you. You know who that is? _Myself. _For all this."

"Let me help you the way you helped me to be the number one on your list of loathing." The file she was holding lands on the desk next to Joe. He follows it's flight with his eyes, looking back at her questioningly and the gaze she's returning sends a chill down his spine. "For you."

He takes the folder into his hands. There's a single photo in it, nothing more. He's not familiar with the faces and though he's uninterested in finding out more about why Lorena gave it to him, the upsetting feeling keeps on growing inside.

"Take a good look at it. Do it." He's doing as he's told, staring at the colorful picture of a child and a woman. "Don't you recognize your mother?" He lifts his head up in slow motion, taking the lawyer into his focus, trying to read her mind. "I even dropped my morality

out of the window for your sake."

"It's not my mother. And this is not me." A little smile appears on her face, relishing in the final moments of peace before the storm.

"That's the whole point. It's your mother with her son. Do you want to hear the story?" Joe gets lost in the picture, letting the details sink in. The eyes... He had seen those eyes. But where? A quiet voice whispers in the back of his head. _In the mirror. _He shakes his head lightly, unable to get in eye contact with Lorena. He has to know. "You made a shallow job while trying to find her. After your father dropped her out she was broken. So broken that she not only ran away but she promised herself that she'll get help and become clean. You were a good enough motivation for that. Later on, she couldn't go back to you. She couldn't make herself look into your eyes after what she did to you. Eventually, years later she met a man and they fell in love. She confessed her sins to him and he was ready to accept your mother the way she way. He forgave her in your name. She was endlessly happy when Jonathan, the boy in the picture, was born. She became the mother she always wanted to be, the best she could. Jonathan was devastated when she died. But he followed her guidance to become a _dreamer_. He's working in structural architecture in Washington, creating wonderful things. Look at me, Joe." He stays motionless, staring at the picture where his mother wraps her arms around a boy that she loved so much more than she loved him, the one she left him for and the one that became a dreamer. Lorena walks up to the man, taking his face into her hands, raising his head. She dries the tears gently with her thumb, fighting the urge to kiss his eyes. He's shattered. But he's not alone with it. She's leaning close to him, speaking softly. "All of the monsters you're tortured by are created by yourself. You're the forger of your own unhappiness. You made me do it. Does it hurt?"

"Yes."

"Good." She outlines his lips with a fingertip, barely touching him, just enough to get a last impression. Her chest is heaving. "Game over. Goodbye, Joe."

* * *

><p>The whole place is nothing but a harsh reminder. A recap of a home that never was and he never knew how much he needed. The only spot he can find a shelter before going insane is the same spot he avoided for as long as he can remember. Joe pauses at the door before deciding to go inside. He can almost smell that familiar, intoxicating scent as her presence still lingers around the room. Maybe it's only in his head as the memories revive, vivid as ever, filling the canvas in his mind with a movie about all the things that happened in his father's office, breathing heavier with every passing moment. He takes the well-known seat in front of the desk, feeling more safe than he ever did in this house. She created a safe bubble for him by pushing the limits, showing what's on the other side of hatred, leaving him with a straw he can cling to.<p>

Joe's been waiting for more than an hour now, but the sound of his father's arrival wakes his doubts. He took the first plane he could catch after Lorena walked out of his apartment. It wasn't the time for pondering options, he did the first thing that felt right.

There's only one person he can ask about the things he heard. He passed the point where he could believe that it's nothing but a lie, something she made up as the most wicked revenge. If there's one difference between him and the lawyer, it must be exactly this. She would never lie. In fact, she's using the truth as the deadliest weapon against anybody, smashing it into their face, forcing them to confront their own selves. This is what she did to him. She took the rose-colored spectacles off of him, lining him up against his biggest fear: reality. It doesn't matter what he told himself anymore. It doesn't matter what his father didn't tell him. It's all about moving on from the past that only existed inside of his imagination, finding out if there's a future somewhere or not.

"Joe?"

"Can you answer a question without lying to me?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Can you or can you not?"

"Of course, I can."

Joe Sr wasn't expecting to find his son at home, especially not in his office. He can almost sense what's behind his appearance. A special ability of a parent, even if the wound in their relationship is incurable, the invisible strands that links them together can never be destroyed. He sits in front of his son, granting all the time he needs.

"Did you know about her? Of course, you knew... I ask it differently, have you kept her away from me on purpose? Have you kept her away from her own son?"

"I have never forbidden her anything, it was your mother's own choice. And I'm not sorry for telling you otherwise." Finally, Joe looks up, searching for evidence of a lie in the man's eyes but he can't find any, staring at him blankly. "Look at yourself, Joe. You're an achiever. Don't degrade yourself by wishing you'd be a _dreamer_ instead. For once in your life, stand up for what you want!"

"You involved her into this."

"I see. Your mother is not the only reason you're here."

* * *

><p>The world has collapsed around him and he can't fight against it. He never felt more powerless. It's not the control that's lost since there's nothing to control anymore. Everything is broken. The more Joe tries to put the fragments back together, the deeper they cut. The first shock is slowly fading away, giving it's place to an unknown level of agony, throbbing within, afflicting every particle of his body since she's been gone. It's not a nightmare. It's a result. The result of destruction they have made until it turned against them and burned it all to the ground while they were staring into the flames, hypnotized instead of stopping the fire.<p>

14. Power Relations

****Power relations****

-15 months later-

The sound of the red Mustang is resounding through the whole street. It's been a while since the last time she visited this specific address. More precisely, it only happened once. During a storm that poisoned her life for months after that. The idea itself sounded crazy enough to make her show up once again. Lorena already has an answer to the question but she's simply too curious to miss out on the opportunity to visit the company. Cameron's company. It sounds insane and something tells her that it doesn't only sound that way.

The lawyer doesn't even have to get out of the car to hear the noise, striking through the engine's sound and the pulled up windows. It's deafening. The music mixes up with shouting and the sound of maniacal laughter. Lorena fixes her attire before heading to the front door, her heels clicking on the pathway leading to the porch. Somebody's snoring gently in a hammock, completely undisturbed by the hellish conditions. She's not bothering with knocking, there's no point in it. Thanks to her quick reflexes, she avoids an unpleasant meeting with half a pair of an extremely dirty combat boot but she can't evade having some of the dried mud getting onto her neck and blouse. The jangle starts to decrease as the woman sweeps the dirt off of herself. She can feel the eyes focused on her movement, looking around slowly. Some of the faces are familiar and some are new. A half naked guy runs out of the kitchen with colorful breakfast crunchies stucked into his beard, holding the other pair of the boot. The grin slowly fades from his face, dropping the shoe on the floor, he strokes his hair back with a theatrical movement before fixing his run-down boxers.

"Christmas came early this year, lady! You don't even have to unwrap your present."

The look on Lorena's face would be threatening enough for anybody to know not to mess around. Her smile cuts like a razor blade.

"I'm looking for Donna." She passes the sizable Romeo but makes a half turn from the kitchen. "As for you, I'm sending my commiseration to your mother. Obviously, she needs it."

"Lorena! Thank you so much for coming here!" Donna rushes to the lawyer, slightly pushing the half naked man to the side. "I'm sorry, I'm really sorry."

"Me too." Her gaze moves over Donna's shoulder, meeting Cameron's eyes. Considering the expression on the programmer's face, the idea wasn't her brainchild at all.

"Tell me you didn't call her to my house."

"Cameron, calm down, please."

"No! We don't need her! We don't need you! Thank you for coming here in your expensive shoes and designer clothing but I don't want you to be snobbing around in here!"

If the plan was to make a scene, it's a success. If it was anything other than this, it's a tremendous mistake.

"I'm a little confused. Who's asking for whose help? You dragged me here and told me, no no no, promised me that there won't be any hidden tricks. You lied."

"I will fix this, I promise. I'm asking for five minutes."

"Five minutes."

"Thank you."

"Don't waste your own time."

* * *

><p>I know it hasn't started out the best way, but I hope the past few days were enough for you to think it over and consider all the possibilities. We're perfectly fine when it comes to the tech part but we can't deal with the legal side. Mutiny has a great potential but it can't function the way it should because we're constantly finding ourselves face to face with missed charges and obligations. It grew over us and I'm worried that we're going to fail this whole thing because we don't pay as much attention to the law as we probably should." Donna can't sit comfortably on the bar stool. She's too stressed out. She's been like this for a while, especially since the first meeting with the lawyer at Mutiny ended up the way it did. The fact that she accepted her visit and gave her another chance to talk it through is enough to hope for the best outcome. She called the babysitter in the last minute, it's a miracle she could even make it here on time.<p>

"Where are you exactly in the 'we'?" Lorena sips from the wine, she can't be fooled. Donna came alone. It probably means something. Most possibly that Cameron either doesn't know about their meeting or she does but is still against it.

"I know how it looks and you're probably right. But it's not about Cameron or me or anybody else. It's about how far this thing can go and I'm very certain that it has a long big future. The reason why I asked you specifically is because I trust your expertise and I know you are someone who can truly get things done. Will you help us or not?"

"It's wonderful that you think way further than the founder of this company herself and I appreciate your interest. But I think I'll go with no." The air freezes for a moment in the room, Donna blinks with disbelief.

"But... Excuse me?"

"It seemed like a decidable question. And I picked no."

"Why would you do this? I'm not asking for a favor, you'll be paid. As we settled before."

"Look, I've seen enough. You're incapable of taming Cameron's hysterical outbursts, yet she's obviously keeping you under full

control as her general servant. It's not your fault. You've taken way more on yourself than you ever should. I've already wasted too much time on excuses, so long story short: you can't pay enough for my tolerance."

The loud knock on the door breaks the stretching silence. Donna would attempt to make the lawyer change her mind but she already deployed all of her best reasons for that. The real shock comes when Gordon appears in the door but unlike his wife, he hasn't come alone.

* * *

><p>It feels like a bizarre daydream, a picture he envisioned for at least a thousand times. A picture that dissipated as soon as he opened his eyes, leaving him with nothing but her absence and the helpless rage that overtook his lungs, constantly gripping on his guts, scratching his skin from the inside. After all those months, countless days and never-ending nights, he got used to the feeling. The permanent hunger that couldn't be satisfied with anything. Whenever he tried, the only thing he could attain was to deepen the contrast between her and everybody else.<p>

Now she's sitting within arm's reach, returning his gaze but keeping her silence obstinately. It's not hard to tell that she's outraged but she's keeping it under control. She's offended by his intrusion, showing up without a word, uninvited, taking advantage of a situation that he's got nothing to do with, using it without a flinch of an eye to get what he wants. The Joe MacMillan method, cross anyone and everyone, take what was destined to be his, may it be true or just his own misconception.

They sit in silence, staring at each other like they have nothing to say when in reality, there are simply too many words to be expressed. Yet, they're choking on them instead. All those pre-thought dialogues are meaningless when the only thing that separates them is a length of a single step.

Joe inhales deeply, letting the long missed, familiar scent to spread through his veins, filling every inch of his body with lust. His muscles are stiff, ready to attack in any second. Even the smallest sign won't be left unnoticed, if only Lorena wouldn't be lingering with that. She knows exactly what the man is waiting for, the same scene has been played over a million times. Everything is different now. She's already steps ahead but she's not willing to reveal her cards just yet. She needs to calm down, she can't let Joe provoke her to the line where she'll most likely lose her mind. Once that happens, there's no turning back.

"Did you find what you've been looking for?" She's uncrossing her legs, taking the heels off, placing them accurately next to the armchair. The man's getting late with the answer. He can't help it, it's like a Pavlovian reflex, swallowing hard by the sight.

"Not really. What I've been looking for found me instead." Lorena's lips curl upward with a tiny sarcastic smile, her expression seems to be impressed.

"Good for you." Her hands stop midway to the table acknowledging that her glass is empty. She looks back at Joe disappointedly. His words sound bitter.

"It's been a long time."

The lawyer can sense the blame in his tone, making her inhale through the nose irritatingly. He still knows how to annoy the hell out of her in less than a second, and she still reacts in the same old way. Lorena gets up from her seat, making her way to the bar. She answers above her shoulder.

"Not long enough, if you ask me."

Wine is out of the question. The situation calls for something way stronger, something that has the potential to successfully soothe her nerves. Lorena grabs a bottle of cognac by the neck, pouring it liberally into a crystal glass. Every move she makes is observed by the man, devouring her through his eyes, hoping it will lessen his hunger but all it does is making it worse, pushing it to the level of untameable.

The woman takes a few steps but she's not going back to her previous spot, purposely extending the distance between them. She leans her back to the counter, smelling into the rich, golden liquid, immediately frowning with disgust. Not even Joe can make her overcome the massive dislike she has toward the full beverage. She places the glass on the marble surface, leaving it untouched.

"You've got balls, Joe. You must be given credit for that. But I don't really have time to waste on you, so why don't we get done with whatever it is you came here for? Make it quick. I'm listening." There's a provocative look on the lawyer's face, arms crossed on her chest. She aware of how her words make the man feel. Every single one is like a slap on his face, turning the tables around. Making his blood boil.

It's a well-deserved return of a favor, his paycheck for angering her the same way, though being fully unaware of it. She will not back down and let him win the duel. Not this one, not this time. Joe should have been more prepared before storming back into her life, but he was careless. He looks nothing like the last time she saw him.

Lorena knew what she should've done, but she was unable to move, the muscles in her body refused to cooperate with her brain. She should have listened to her common sense screaming inside of her head and resist the urge, she should have turn around and walk away but it was physically impossible. Every nerve was aching, burning slowly under her skin. She made a dangerously big mistake. All of the things she heard made it all worse, cutting into a wound that hasn't had the time to heal. That single door between them meant nothing, it couldn't save the woman from a hurricane. The first look. All she wanted was a quick moment but her gaze was glued to the man, absorbing every inch of him. His body, his brokenness as he was sitting there all on his own. His face buried in his palms. She swallowed but the bitter taste couldn't leave her mouth. She knew it was unfair. She should have been impeached as well, being responsible for not taking legal steps against blackmailing, hacking, malpractice on every level of the management. Yet, she wasn't even questioned about the mistakes, not a single word was shared about what should've happened differently. Lorena's presence was less than moderately stimulating for Nathan. In his head, he was already preparing himself

for the final confrontation with the only chargeable person behind the downfall, the real mortal enemy of Cardiff Electric. Joe MacMillan.

"Just for your reference, this is the time when you should break the silence. Correct me if I'm wrong, but something tells me that you're the one waiting for some kind of a plea. If this is the case, I can assure you I have nothing to confess." The tension is rising slowly. The lawyer's tone remains silent but sharp, the best way to hit the softest spot.

"Nice place." Joe doesn't move his gaze away from the target, not letting himself to get distracted. The statement itself is way more of a reproach than a compliment. He's hurt by many things and the number keeps on growing the more he gives himself up to anger. They both know the reason behind why she moved and picked herself a new home. This one is untouched. It's pure from memories and passion. Pure from pain. There's nothing to remind the woman of him, nothing to help her remember his touch. She did it all on purpose. To cut him off completely.

"Nice haircut." A little grin sits on Lorena's face while waiting for the expression of realization to appear on the man's face. He came here thinking that she can be deceived while he couldn't even believe his own lies.

Joe was informed about her being in Dallas for a while now though she never moved a finger to let him know. Never looked for him, never cared to get in touch. He wanted to find her, he really tried. But every path made him crash into a wall. The last drop in the glass was the day when her house got sold. He needed a minute to face a fact that was continuously refused to be seen: she was gone and he might never see her again. From all of the things that ever happened between them, nothing felt the way it did. Nothing was more painful than missing her.

"Nice tan. Were you enjoying yourself?" He sounds way more provocative than he should but instead of calming down, he's aiming for the heavies, ignoring what the consequences might be. A thought that couldn't leave his mind. "Or someone else?"

Lorena grunts with disbelief, shaking her head slightly. She's offended. She wouldn't care about Joe making a joke out of himself, but the way he spits these words out makes her palms itchy.

"Good to know you're still an asshole. Not like I was expecting something else."

"Answer the question." There's no doubt about it being an open challenge.

She doesn't like to be pushed to the limit, but the list of people who can actually do that consist rarely more than one name. She's aware of the risk and it would be a shame to lose a game with nothing but aces in her hands. The anticipation on Joe's face turns into rage within two seconds as it becomes clear that she's not about to take up the gantlet. Instead, she flashes a threatening smile at the man, pushing herself away from the counter, taking a quick step toward him.

"You know what? I have a better idea. Let me show you something!" She walks with easy steps as the pastel peach, floaty dress waves around her body, emphasizing the sun-kissed skin tone. "See this magical device? It bears the ability to unite or separate spaces, but the best part is that it works according to my will. Especially since it's my property. Get the fuck out." She's holding the door wide open with a tiny evil smirk vibrating on her lips.

Joe stabs his stare into her eyes, contemplating whether she's being serious or not. It's not a question who's got the upper hand. He's thrown out. He gets on his feet, followed by the lawyers eyes as he's getting closer to her. Their staring contest stays as intense as ever, he's not wasting time to look away while grabbing the door by its side and slams it loudly with a wide move. He takes a step forward but Lorena gets him by surprise when she remains motionless, not backing away as he expected.

He's towering above her, a never-failing move to irritate her the way he always did and started to enjoy it even more since she refused to feel intimidated by it. He leans down without a warning, stroking her lips with his thumb. The familiar softness sends a chill down his spine, like finding an oasis in the middle of a desert, he's easing the thirst from her mouth. It doesn't matter how long he had to go without having it, he never forgot the taste of her tongue. She draws back from the kiss but leaves zero time for Joe to wonder, the slap on his face comes as naturally as the prelude itself. They're both standing mesmerized by the element of surprise. Lorena wasn't playing around with an alibi smack, she went in with full power and considering how much she's been against physical aggression all her life, she nailed the task perfectly. If only her hand wouldn't feel like she was attempting to crash a brick wall with it. The man looks astonished by the sudden change of events, it's the second time in a row he gets something fully unexpected from the woman.

"I will make you pay for this." He makes sure the threat sounds legitimate, gripping Lorena by the arm.

"I dare you to try it."

There's no hesitation in his move, smashing the lawyer against the door, pushing her into it with his own body. Joe can feel her chest heaving underneath him, the hot little breaths against his neck. He's restraining himself from ripping her clothes off as much as he can but he's getting closer and closer to the end of his self-control. He's rock hard, craving every inch of her as they're grinding on each other in ecstasy. Her hand wanders to the most aching point, moaning with delight as she's seizing it through the fabric of his jeans. Her fingers move higher, finding their way underneath his shirt, alternating scratches with caresses. He's not heating up under her palms, there's nowhere to enhance it. He's already blazing, his body pleading to be touched.

Lorena knows it's over. Fighting her instinct is redundant, a long lost game. She tried to reach the same heights but the experience was irreproducible, making her even more mad at Joe. Every time she attempted to ease the pressure, she caught herself thinking about him, how his body feels next to hers, his moves, his spectacular talents. Nobody could satisfy her the way he did. Nobody could overdo her expectations with him in her mind. The only time she made a good use of his constant presence within her thoughts was while shooting

clay pigeons, replacing the flying objects with him. She rarely missed a shot. The thought makes her giggle but she keeps the information for herself.

"You want to include me in the fun?"

"Aren't you having fun already?" She's out of breath, Joe's pressing the air out of her lungs with his weight, bending down to reach her neck for a bite. The lawyer's reaction is as tasty as her skin, whimpering with pleasure by the sweet pain.

She pulls the man's shirt up, indicating what she wants to do. He's withdrawing with half a step, letting her stroke the white textile off his chest before dropping it on the ground. Lorena can't stop feasting her eyes on him. He seems even bigger and wider than he used to be though the most delirious part is that he was always a considerable size. Her fingertips moving slowly across his skin, relishing in the smooth sensation but it's not enough anymore. She's unable to resist the urge, leaning forward to reach him with her lips, she kisses his pecs, drawing little circles around his nipples with her tongue, nibbling on his shoulder. Joe forgets to breathe, his head dropped back with delight. The more he feels her, the more he wants and the more she gets into it the greater her fury becomes.

Dramaturgically, this could be the perfect moment to drop the man out once and for all like he would deserve it, making sure he'll never forget the ordeal. But it's not about him. It's about Lorena. It's about the feeling that should've faded by now. The fever that should have been cured by the time and the distance. Yet, she's holding onto him like her life is depending on it, inhaling the smell of his skin. His arms curl around her back, wrapping her into the safety of his embrace though she's never been in bigger danger anywhere else. He lifts the woman up, squeezing her buttocks tightly as her legs go around his waist.

"How should I take you?" She grabs his chin firmly, leaning close to his mouth but refusing to accept the kiss. She grips on his hair strongly with her other hand, the smirk she usually spares for nobody but Joe appears on her face.

"Do you really think it's you who's going to decide?" His palm slide under the dress, stroking up on the bottom of her thigh, giving the slightest little press through her panties with the side of his thumb. He's watching her in awe, her eyes close instantly, biting on her lips to muffle the sound of her whine.

"Apparently, yes."

"You dirty bastard."

"Your insults are music to my ears."

He carries the lawyer to the kitchen, unzipping the back of her dress on the way but he's too impatient to wait until it will be gone, sneaking underneath the light fabric. The moment he puts her down the peachy outfit falls to the floor, revealing the white lingerie, making Joe moan with anticipation by the sight. Lorena's hands move quickly on his jeans, barely ripping it away. They shiver with excitement when their skin finally meets. She doesn't shy away from

getting into his boxers before getting rid of it, watching closely as he's flinching by her touch. His lips parted with desire as she's grabbing him, her moves unhurried and tight, driving him insane. Her eyes never leave the man's.

"Did you miss me, Joe?"

He grabs her wrists and turns the woman around, grinding against her roughly as she's arching her back to him. He goes down to his knees, taking the white lace off, following it with his lips all the way down to her calves. He straightens up and frees her skin from the last bit of clothing, covering her shoulders with kisses, biting on the nape of her neck. His fingers sliding to her core, finding her drenched with lust.

"Not less than how you missed me."

Joe doesn't warn her before sliding himself all the way inside. She's more than ready to take him, yet the unexpected move leaves her knees weak. They moan together by the exquisite sensation, remaining motionless to relish in the moment they've been longing for all this time. Calling it incredible would be nothing but a serious understatement. Leaning on the counter, their fingers entwined. They both know it won't be long before the explosion. Their bodies can't take it. His movement is slow and sensuous, his sighs burning the soft skin on Lorena's back. She turns her head for a kiss, feeling him going deeper and deeper with every thrust, whispering his name into his mouth. She's reaching back to grab his hips, hypnotized by the experience. She's not simply seeing stars but the whole galaxy in front of her eyes. The moment his fingertips brush against her most delicate spot, she's reaching the limit of pleasure her body can take, bringing Joe with her to the highest point while tightening around him, her walls convulsing with the overwhelming force of the climax, making him groan loudly into her skin while releasing himself.

The tremble can't seem to subside. Even the chilly marble surface of the counter can't ease the fever. Joe fondles her sides, his hands never stop on her, bathing her in kisses and strokes. The only thing he doesn't indulge her with is honesty.

"Don't accept the offer." Lorena's look is only moderately surprised.

"This is what I call pillow talk. I don't know if you realized it but you're not my boss anymore." She can feel the man grinning against her skin. "You think I can't handle Mutiny?"

"I think Mutiny can't handle you."

15. Resistance

****Resistance****

Joe turns his head toward the parking car in slow motion, it has to be another trick his mind plays on him. Either this or the beginning of a particularly tasteless nightmare. His face muscles are far from being under control, he rushes inside from the terrace like a hurricane, crossing the place with vast steps before ripping the

entrance open.

"What are you doing here?" He's trying to whisper but his baritone still sounds like shouting. The terror on his face is genuine.

Lorena walks up the few stairs that separate them, gently patting the man's chest with a wide grin. She returns the whisper.

"Relax, I'm not alone. I've brought some alcohol." The burgundy dress fits her perfectly, drawing around her shape tightly before ending just beneath her knees, consummated with the obligatory heels. Her appearance is a kick in the groin every time, but within given circumstances, it's even more painful. The woman lifts the bottle to Joe's eyes. "Come on, why do you think you're the only one who's allowed to show up without a word?"

"Lorena, no. You can't just..."

"Joe?" The voice comes from the house. It's unfamiliar. And female.

"You should see your face. Don't stress it over, MacMillan." The lawyer thinks about biting his chin for the sake of diversion but it would be hardly appropriate. She holds back the urge, taking half a step to get closer instead. "I've given you enough time and you still think I'm an idiot. It's offending. You dare coming to my home to reproach me?"

"For how long did you know?"

"You were getting late with the introduction." The conversation is cut short by the dark haired woman appearing at the door, her eyes widen by the sight but Lorena is on top of the situation, taking both the lead and Joe's fortune in her hands.

"I'm impressed we finally meet, Sara. I've heard so much about you. Welcome back in town, Joe."

* * *

><p>Her fingers keep on reaching him somewhere, brushing against a shoulder, a thigh, wherever she fancies at the moment. Only half of it is done consciously, the rest is pure instinct. She's not doing it for Joe, the show goes exclusively for Lorena and she pays a very close attention to it. Sara is way too desperate to mark the territory she considers her own. The effort is definitely worth the appreciation, the lawyer raises the glass at the woman theatrically.<p>

"I'm dying to hear the story behind your fairy tale. Tell me, Joe, where did you come across a woman who could see through the surface and find the human under the shell?" She's balancing on a very thin line, aggravating him with every carefully chosen word.

"It's not a new acquaintance, we've known each other before." He doesn't even stand a chance to answer himself, Sara is dubbing him over and over again. What she's afraid of is not perfectly clear yet, but whatever is poisoning her from the inside, sooner or later she will have to spit it out.

Lorena's gaze is drifting back and forth between the two of them, her smile slowly fading. She didn't have any expectations or a specific strategy figured out before heading to this place. She could hardly even tell why she bothered with a visit at all but the lump in her throat is disturbing enough to draw her attention to the reality that she's in fact making a terrible mistake. And it's not much about her sitting on the world's most uncomfortable couch in Joe's cozy little nest that's the opposite of everything he represents or that he's sharing it with another living, breathing human being, but about the agitating feeling that she cares. Her intention was to make the man feel anguished, to entertain herself with his face knowing that she's got what it takes to blow his whole world up with a snap of a finger. But sharing the same feeling with him was never part of the plan. Somehow the news about him always found their way into her ears regardless of where she was hiding. Would it be an ocean away or in New York, the fragments of his existence followed her everywhere, especially after Cardiff collapsed. They might have set the dominoes up in collaboration but he was the one pushing the first tile.

Joe's sitting with arms folded across his chest, his eyes devouring the woman in front of him. He can accept being loathed by anyone as long as Lorena is not one of them. If only he could read her mind. A part of him is praying for the night to end with him remaining the invincible king of his castle, ignoring that the walls are built out of lies, blood and sweat and he will be able to continue marching into the glory he deserves. The other part of him begs the lawyer to ruin it all, to destroy his imaginary kingdom, shout out about what kind of a monster he is and what they had together. What they were together. He begs for help with the band-aid that has melded with his skin and now the only way to get rid of it fully is to rip it off but he's soaking it with water instead.

The idea was perfect. It was just what he needed, what his ego was crying for. And Sara was so willing to provide the balm to his throbbing wounds, covering him with the blanket of her need. Whatever he said, she believed. It wasn't his victory. She believed him because she chose to believe and though he knew it just as much as Sara did, they both turned a blind eye on the lack of real trust for the sake of a false illusion. He had to create his own solution, so that's what he did and it felt satisfying until the same gods who kept on playing against him granted the only wish he had and put Lorena back onto his palms just to laugh at the odds.

"So you and Joe were working together at Cardiff?" The lawyer answers with an approving blink, tearing her look away from the man. "He told me what happened there. I know it was hard for all of you and I know that he wasn't the best man back then." Lorena leans forward a little in her seat, making sure she gets every word right. "He told me what happened?" "We both were in a rather vulnerable state when we met again and I'm sure the healing process started when he opened up and detoxicated himself from all the anger and disappointment that was trapped inside." Joe swallows but keeps his silence as the scene turns from gloomy into grotesque in no time.

The lawyer couldn't storm out the door fast enough but she's simply too amazed to leave. Sara seems harmless in black leggings and oversized shirt and she almost managed to fool Lorena with the high school girl charm. She's anything but harmless.

"He deserves another chance."

"I know. He's a ray of sunshine peeking through the clouds on a rainy day, isn't he?" Lorena is done moderating herself. Everybody in here is crazy. What is this about? Money? Power? Would that be possible for Joe MacMillan to go that low? She can see him staring from the corner of her eyes but she's not interested. She can't make herself get into that kind of communication though there's rarely any other way for them to talk. Sara's fingers are entwining with Joe's. Lorena puts the glass on the table before leaning back on the couch. A maniacal laughter is scratching her throat. _She doesn't know anything._

"I know about the manipulation and the lies, the Giant. And I know about Cameron too." Joe inhales deeply, closing his eyes like that could help him disappear. Like a kid who believes that if he can't see anything it probably means that he's already invisible. "But I have never heard about you."

"I assume it's because there really wasn't anything worth talking about." He opens his eyes just in time to catch her shrug. From all the things she could have said, she picked the worst one. "I've never met a more hideous superior than him. Well, maybe recently I did but never mind. I was dreaming about choking him with a pillow every night." Her expression is lightened up with the kindest, widest smile she can squeeze out. Sara returns the gesture but misses the core of it, authenticity.

The phone rings about the seventh time but it remains fully ignored. Whoever is on the other side of the line is extremely tenacious. The sound gets less tolerable with every repetition.

"Do you want me to pick it up? I feel so at home after all." Lorena's tone in physical form could be represented by a handful of plutonium. Sara being unfamiliar with her sarcasm jumps on her feet, signaling with her hands that she will take care of it. "I better leave the love birds alone, it was already too much fun for one day. Sara, it was a pleasure finally meeting you. Keep up the good work taming the beast."

"I'll show you out." Joe's hand touches her waist, his eyes flashing with rage. Sara waves goodbye, she's distracted by the call, talking like a school girl who just got scolded by the principal. It doesn't take much for Lorena to figure out who she's talking to.

"Please show me out. Otherwise, I'd just mysteriously get lost somewhere between the coffee table and the door." She turns to face the man from outside, he's positioning himself to cover the woman, leaning on the door frame with both hands, looking strikingly appetizing after their mute encounter, turned on to the limit. "What the hell is wrong with you? I thought you don't have any more disgusting moves left to surprise me with but man, I was wrong. Well done, Joe, well done. She thinks you were made out of candy, glitter and rainbows."

"You had the chance to tell her otherwise." There's nothing he can do to ease the hunger, it just eats him from the inside. Desiring her flesh, smelling the scent of her lust stroking deep within his veins. In his head their bodies are already pressing against one another, their tastes combined while his hands sneak under her dress to feel

her burning excitement. She deserves no mercy for what she did. He won't find gratification thinking about her while projecting his ferocity on someone else. He can deceive the mind but he can never mislead the body. "Why didn't you tell her about us?"

"You see, this is the problem. You can't see further than your own delusions. There is no _us_. You told her everything by not saying anything. It's your problem, not mine."

* * *

><p>She took over the kitchen. Theoretically, it's shared with Bosworth but since he spends a considerable amount of his time on the field it's mostly Lorena's empire. If it can be called as such. It's been a few weeks now since she accepted the offered position at Mutiny and not a single day passed without second guessing herself about it. She's not used to the conditions, the people and the lack of proficiency, not to mention the holes in the managerial knowledge. She made her vindications clear at the first minute but nobody took them seriously.<p>

Donna being the only usable person from the whole bunch struggles with most of the problems everyone else ignores, leaving her stuck with more, week after week. She's repeating the same sentence to the lawyer every morning: I know it's not done yet, but I will take care of it. Lorena started from whatever papers they could provide and the longer she's waiting for the rest, the main problem about Mutiny becomes clearer. It's not a company but more of a pigsty. The whole place is too disordered to have basic functionality and chances are it won't even have time to improve before it gets locked down with every chattel kept inside.

Obligations don't bear with a meaning for Cameron, the bills and notifications end up as napkins with a three days old slice of pizza or simply disappear somewhere among the absurd amount of garbage she's surrounding herself with. A lawyer is only a secondary need. The primary one is a qualified unit to clean and sanitize the mess. If she was uninterested in the already existing difficulties before, now that a new network has magically appeared she's even less intent to show responsibility in a matter that can cost her more than what she can afford.

Lorena's steps are long and imperious as she's striding toward Cameron's room but she changes her mind halfway, turning back into the kitchen before repeating the same route with a minor roundabout. Everybody knows she's getting closer by the sound of her heels clicking on the floor.

It wasn't necessary for her to deliver a speech on her first actual work day at Mutiny. Their first encounter with the lawyer was memorable enough not to venture another bungle, setting aside the struggle for small talk, drinking beer together or for a quick round in the bathroom. She gave a new meaning to the word 'unattainable' but quickly became the mystical creature who's hated and coveted at the same time.

A bunch of rolled up bin bags land on the nearest desk, the owner of the spot hardly dares to look up at the woman but, this time, she clearly wants the attention.

"Listen up, people! I know you're all incredibly busy all the time but unfortunately, I have run out of patience about two and a half minutes ago. I couldn't care less about how you live at your own place. I assure you, I could not. However since you practically live your lives in this godforsaken house, you do owe respect for the simplest fact: it's a place to get work done. Now the only problem is that it's fully unsuitable for anything like that. Here I'm offering you a resolution. You get up, clean this dump from the bottom to the top, place every single envelope with a formal sender on it on the kitchen table, whether it's opened or untouched. Please don't have illusions. In case you want me to do it, I will. But just so you know, I will drop everything out. And I will set it on fire in the middle of the backyard. Speaking of which, don't forget about that area as well because it looks utterly disgusting. Did I manage to make myself clear?" She leaves them breathless. It's a clear ultimatum. Nothing they haven't heard before. The request has been floating in the air since Lorena set her foot on the board. Nobody makes a move when she's heading to see Cameron.

With music blasting in the headphones, she doesn't stand a chance hearing the lawyer's arrival though she makes sure to slam the door loud enough. She walks closer to the programmer, waiting for a sign that she acknowledged the intrusion. Donna turns up a few seconds later, ready to water the volcano that is about to erupt. She considers it her own fault. She promised to organize a clean up and get the papers together before it's too late.

Half a look at Lorena is enough for Cameron to feel insulted but this time, the lawyer's wrath is in priority.

"I am not taking responsibility for you. This company is nonviable and by company, I mean chaos."

"The door is open. I won't beg you to stay." Lorena flashes a sharp smile, stepping closer to the girl. Her behavior is borderline pathetic, acting the same way she always did ever since they met at Cardiff, unable to step over a conflict, not even for the sake of her own.

"I don't require, thank you. You can wipe the sulky pout off your face and start acting like an adult maybe."

"You're not giving me orders! Nobody gives orders in here, especially not you!"

"It's not an order, it's an advice. You better take it or you can start packing before the catchpole drops you out. You're stomping on your own worth with two feet and it's not even intentional, you're just lazy to look around and see what needs to be improved! If it's only about you, then who cares? But the sad truth is that you should show responsibility for all of these people and you straight up doesn't give a shit, hiding behind your theory about the perfect anarchy. You don't have to be a dictator but you have to live up to what you're playing and be a leader! You're blind to anything but your own truth."

"I hate you." She sounds less believable than expected, getting on her feet to continue the staring contest from a better position. She would respond. She wants to. But what she has to say is more personal than spitting it out while anybody else is around. It's been

simmering inside of her for a while now, almost ready to share.

* * *

><p>The sight makes his stomach turn and his mouth run dry at the same time, the last person he was expecting and also the same one he's continuously yearning to see. Would it be possible for her to sense the thoughts in his head, feel him visualizing her presence so intensely that she suddenly turned into reality? Did she finally materialized and step out of his imagination to end a situation that should have never gone this far?<p>

The men in the office seem to keep their distance from the woman as she's sitting at Joe's desk in her trademark position, legs crossed. She's ignored on purpose. Nobody dares to shoot a single glare at her partially exposed thighs, afraid that she might catch it. And she would, it's not even a question. Lorena is in perfect control of the whole scene, absorbing every little detail that's coming from around the room. She's a real magician when it comes to reading people, always a wonderful way to surprise and intimidate, all at the same time. They don't even know who the lawyer is and though there must be a few guesses about it, none of them is brave enough to ask. All she needs is her own presence to make them accept a leash around their necks, voluntarily choosing to stay silent and obedient instead. The woman hardly cares about the audience when the only person she's actually here for is being late with his arrival.

Joe's still standing by the elevator, motionless like a statue. He has to be careful. The circumstances are standing against him, especially since Sara successfully managed to get herself into the single thing she should never even attempt to get close to. If only his instincts could cooperate with his right mind, but the task is un-accomplishable whenever Lorena is around. The man combs his hair back with his fingers before taking the first confident step, his ego howls with horror by the thought of the woman seeing him way under the position he used to be. His performance is flawless while marching toward the glass door with a posture of a king, tall, chest out. Believable for anyone who doesn't know him good enough to notice the clenched jaw or the flustered breathing. He's not a royal anymore. The crown has been stolen and his empire has been ravaged to the ground.

Every head turns to the man's direction when he steps into the office, his glare interlocked with the lawyer's. Her smile is genuine, she's having way more fun at his expense than she should.

"I said I was looking for a prick and they directed me right here from the reception. You clearly have an impact on people." The briefcase slams loudly on the desk, yet not even a single eyelash flutters on her face. "Don't be grumpy, it was supposed to be a compliment."

"Did you miss out on your morning coffee? Come with me, I'll get you some. I promise I'll try not to drown you in it." She can't help with the provocation, it's too tempting. The way he's trying to contain the rage, how his body reacts to it.

"We both know the worth of your promises, I'm afraid." A muscle twitches at his temple while lowering himself to the level of the

woman's face, leaning substantially closer than it would be acceptable, his look wanders at her lips impulsively. His tone is soft.

"Do I have to drag you?"

"Do I have to remind you of the meaning of personal space?" Her sarcasm fails to mask away the velocity of her breathing, rapidly quickening with every passing second. She's clenching her fists to avoid grabbing a handful of his hair, forcing him to tilt his head back, allowing her to get a taste of his neck. The problem is, he deserves a punch in the face rather than her tongue on his skin.

Lorena raises both hands to signal she's done with the conversation, or at least that she's not willing to continue it in front of a crowd. She doesn't need assistance from others to humiliate. She can do that all by herself. Joe straightens up, giving room for the lawyer to make her way out before taking the lead, conducting her to a nearby door. The gray encasement of the servers surely won't disturb their privacy.

"What are you up to?" The woman walks around a box and leans on it, making sure to have something to separate her from the man.

There's a slight incomprehension on his face, the reason behind her visit is still unclear but as soon as she barricades herself away the only hope he has had is being killed, leaving him frustrated and disappointed. Lorena takes a deep breath to calm herself. She can read his expressions like a book.

"Why are you here?"

"Obviously not because I was bored at home. What are you up to, Joe? Let me make it clear before you get the wrong impression, I don't care about how you're fucking up your life, my only interest in you is fully professional." His forebodings aren't telling him anything good and she's enjoying the game. She can, as long as she believes there's anything that can possibly hold him back from taking her into his grip. The man reaches the lawyer with long steps, letting her think that she is safe indeed.

"Professionally?"

"More precisely, as the counsel of Mutiny. Thank you for encouraging me, by the way." The usual smirk is sitting in the corner of her lips.

"I should have known you're ready to do the opposite of whatever I say. Did you talk to Gordon?"

"Gordon? No. You really think you can outsmart me? I didn't need to ask anybody, this whole thing screams your name. This is the last time I'm asking and you better give me a goddamn answer, what are you up to?"

Joe shakes his head lightly, he's still not done processing the information. It's not that they aren't playing on the same team but the fact that they're straight up racing against each other. He had plans. He was ready to include her when the time is right but it

doesn't mean a thing anymore. His bright prospects are blowing up like colorful balloons, one by one, threatening to leave him with nothing but the cold reality. Every muscle in his body is uptight to the maximum but he's not even bothered by it, being already used to the torturous feeling. All of the energy he puts into the lie he calls his life keeps on killing him one day at a time.

There was one moment when he could be himself without the pressure of playing the role of the vessel of his true self, a single minute when life took him over, filled his veins with the thrill of existence. Just when he was about to accept that everything is irreversibly gone and lost forever. That's when he was wrapped in her embrace, her lips kissing away the angst of those months, her hands caressing the tension out of his body. The smell of her skin lingering over his, the taste he missed for too long but wasn't able to forget. All of the power she has without knowing about half of it. He never gave it to her, she just took it. How it happened is still a mystery. _They are both takers_. The words keep on crawling back into his mind over and over again while laying awake at night, feeling like he belongs in a different bed. Joe is not sad anymore. He's empty. Lorena claims she's a taker and she's right. Still there is nobody else who can give that much pleasure before evening it all out with the same amount of pain.

The man's eyes meet with the lawyer's when he finally raises his head. She's not smiling, there isn't a trace of sarcasm on her face. The fun is over.

"You're in deep shit, Joe. I always knew you were prone to do stupid things, but this one takes it to a whole new level of fatuity. It's virgin territory even for you."

"Where have you been?"

"Where have I been? Where are you? You focus on creating the winning piece so hard that you don't even recognize the destruction you make. You're self-destructing in a basement. You know, not everything that seems like a good idea worth sticking your dick into it. Considering your current state, I hope you have a good plan to fix it."

"Maybe I should use your method and run away from the problem." The unexpected, sharp tone causes her to take a step back, measuring the man from a distance. They can say whatever they want, there's no such thing as change when it comes to people, it's an impossible task. A wolf is unable to live a rabbit's life. Personality is permanent.

"I eliminated the problem when I stopped being a part of it."

"You eliminated nothing." The slow steps are even more threatening than a quick run would be. His eyes are wicked. Whatever masquerade he's wearing for the sake of the new Joe MacMillan is melting right off of him. The beast is forced to live in a cage but once the door is open, it has to go and feast.

Lorena doesn't make a move. She won't give Joe the pleasure to see her backing down. Her resistance is unquestionable and it makes her even more tempting. She's a fighter, she's not handing herself over and surrender even when the man pins her against the nearest surface, smashing her body with his own. A familiar feeling he hasn't

practiced for a while, sensing her squirming with rage under him. She's blazing from head to toe, her skin is like a magnet to his hands.

"So this is how you want it to be played, ah?" She sounds hoarse but he's refusing to ease the pressure. He can not be eliminated. His hips are grinding on the lawyer's to give her a vivid impression of his rigidness. It doesn't matter if they're naked or not, their clothes will catch on fire soon enough if they continue like this. Lorena grabs him roughly, enjoying his groan by the touch. "I won't waste time, effort or energy to ruin your pastime play."

"Why?" Joe's whispering onto her neck, sending chills all over her body. Her grip wanders up at his throat, pushing his head back to grant him a look into her eyes.

"Because I have bigger ambitions than you." He stares at her with disbelief, his lips parted, swollen with lust. Her expression is determined. She's deeply hurt. "I'm not interested in being the runner up."

"Don't do this."

"I want a legal agreement about the connection between Mutiny and Westgroup in printed form, signed by Jacob Wheeler and you. By tomorrow." Joe curls his fingers around her wrist, removing the grasp from his neck before leaning close to the woman, placing a kiss on her forehead. It's too unexpected. Too intimate and gentle with a meaning he could never put into words. The motion hits a sensitive spot, surprising Lorena with her own reaction. Her body sliding away from the man's, rushing through the door without a single word. She will never let him see her tears again.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry for turning whatever we could have had into war.

16. Rain On Your Parade

****Surferosa: 4U! As per usual. My little mind reader!****

****AnastasiaNoelle: I know it always takes ages for me to finish a new chapter, I'm so ashamed. But I hope you'll enjoy this little peek into the emotional side and I also hope you're ready for me turning everything around and finishing it up with some... fire. A little hint for the next one: it will be fun :) ****

****Dear Guest, let me answer you right here! Thank you for the support, I'm really glad if you're having fun with this story because I personally enjoy the hell out of writing it. I'll be honest with you, I didn't want to include Sara in this at all. The character itself is as empty as my coffee mug right now. She had zero purpose in the show but I figured that I can use her to intensify the contrasts. She is not a competitor for Lorena but the situation is rather tricky. It makes me so proud to hear that you like Lorena so much, I was very disappointed with the female characters in the show, I confess. They wasted all the time on Cameron when they could give that all to Donna instead... About that group meet up, I like the idea :) ****

* * *

><p>Rain on your parade

The grass is dark green and damp, caressing her feet as she's rushing down the hill, drunken by the scent of the dawn. The bright red and orange colors of the morning paint a picture of light across her figure, the white dress wimpling around her legs like angry waves of an ocean. She clutches her hands around the fabric, holding it above her knees to ease the movement.

The scenery is familiar, she spent half of her childhood here. If the woman would turn around, she could still see the outlines of the building towering above the never ending garden, the glass cottage, and the tulips. If only she would have time to waste. But she's in a hurry. This time, she can't let herself miss it, she has to make it down in time. Her heartbeats echoing in her ears, her breaths quick and hassled while the pressure in her stomach keeps on increasing. She recoils for a brief moment to take a half turn, watching as the white flower falls onto the grass bed from her hair before returning to run. The same mantra repeating in her head: 'Wait for me!' She's steps away from the bottom of the hill, her feet reaching the warm asphalt. She hasn't seen him leave yet. A pale beam of hope awakens in her body, making her blood rush, fueling her pace. She's not tired anymore. Her lungs are burning, but the pain feels distant and trivial.

Everything looks the same, yet nothing is how it's supposed to be. The speed of her steps is slowly reducing, finding the garage empty and deserted. The walls are freshly painted, clean and untouched, the ground is spotless. She walks in circles, desperately looking for a single trace but there's none she can find. The weak promise of hope silently dies away, leaving a glob of darkness behind, throbbing deep within. She's lost again. She could have saved him if she would have run faster if she would have cared enough. If she would have given more effort.

Only one thing left for her and she's terrified of it, crouching down on the ground with hands pressed on her ears. She already knows it's impossible to avoid the sound, there's barely a chance to subdue it. It will rip her apart. The deafening sound of crashing metal, glasses cracking, cutting into the flesh. 'Don't! Please stop it!'

The touch is tender against her skin. It's unexpected but well received. If she'd be brave enough to look up, she would. The fear is still present, yet the noise lags behind, never reaching her ears. The arms are tight around her as she traces them up to the shoulders with careful fingertips. The muscles react without hesitation, shuddering under the skin. A well-known body offering a shelter she never asked for but already accepted, burying her face in the curve of his neck, clinging to his shirt with a strong grasp like her life is depending on it. A warm bubble in the middle of an icy storm.

It's not Luke.

Lorena's eyes shoot open in terror, the dragon fire in her lungs is about to break lose as she's jumping out of the bed, staring into the

semi-darkness with a heaving chest. Her back hits the cold surface of the wall, pressing herself flat against it. She's never been more awake, her mind is clear and sharp like a knife but her muscles are tense and hard, her body weak from the shock, covered in a thin, shiny layer of cold sweat. She's shaking.

The covers are lazily moving on the bed, causing the lawyer a moment of panic before dropping her head hard against the wall. She's forcing herself to breath slowly but it's not as easy as she would wish it to be, her wrath growing bigger with every inhale. Joe attacked in her most vulnerable state, ruining her night. Again. Lorena floods the room with light before storming into the bathroom, wrapping herself in a silky robe, giving a quick look from the corner of her eyes at the shifting figure on the bed. She's not wasting her time being gentle with the wakening.

After making her way into the kitchen, the lawyer hesitates between a shot of espresso or a glass of wine but ends up pouring some bourbon for herself, swallowing the thick liquid without a second thought. Her eyes remain shut while her body struggles to take in the alcohol, lighting every particle of her system on fire, burning it all up. She's way too disappointed for her own good.

Yesterday's occurrences might have hit her hard, stunned by her own reactions, the permanent pressure somewhere deep within her stomach that left her mad and disturbed. It was nothing but a sickness, indicated by circumstances that she have tried hard to ignore. Apparently, her endeavors went to waste and she had to taste the sourness of not bearing with every aspect of control. She picked the best possible therapy. It was supposed to be easy and effective. Easy it was, but the effectiveness was moderately satisfying. It's not that she picked the wrong guy. Her eyes automatically found him two seconds after she stepped into the bar. He was tall, wide and familiar. He wasted tens of hours to tempt Lorena into bed back in New York, a few years ago when Joe MacMillan was nothing but a name she never heard of. She never needed the meat that threw itself on her, leaving her parts that desired the hunt empty and aching. After all those years it was finally his night. He was about to be the prey and didn't even see it coming. His natural talents were impressive and though he proved himself to be an affectionate lover, his lack of sedulity for domination made him predictable and boring.

The lawyer caught herself comparing the man to someone else. The feeling of his body beside her. Inside of her. Rage was the fuel in her veins and her blood turned into lava the very moment she reached the climax, envisioning Joe's eyes staring into hers, pupils dilated with passion.

The wake up method works perfectly, Lorena's eyes scanning the man on the other side of the counter, leaning against the marble surface with one hand, shielding his eyes from the light with the other, naked and built. The more she asks herself how the view makes her feel, the easier it is to determine the answer; nothing. Unless her imagination modifies the picture to her liking but that's strictly forbidden.

"For a moment, I thought I was in the army."

"Let's see how fast you can dress up." Even though the lawyer's smiling, the sharpness of her tone supports that she indeed means

what she says. The man looks impressed, chuckling lightly.

"Are you serious right now?"

"I am. I have to work."

"At 3:42 in the morning?" He doesn't get an answer but a glass in his hands instead, the golden beverage shines in the lamp light. "Am I thrown out?"

"No. I'm asking you nicely to leave."

* * *

><p>Joe's sitting in an armchair outside Jacob Wheeler's office, his legs constantly moving and if they stop for a millisecond, his fingers start to dance around. His calmness is barely believable on the outside and he's slowly running out of time to gather what's left of it for the better. It's hard. Harder than it's supposed to be and it angers him to a level where his hands start to shake and his mind begins to wander.<p>

Lorena put him into an incredibly displeasing situation and there was no other option left for him but to comply her demands. She could have asked him anything but she chose to put a gun to his head, forcing him to a game of Russian roulette. From all the possibilities, she chose the worst one when all he wanted her to do was to tilt her head back and sigh by the feeling of his teeth scraping softly against her neck as he's making his way to her mouth, letting her nibble his lips before their tongues start to fight for dominance. The man swallows by the thought, hardly being able to sit and remain at the same place.

Jacob's secretary keeps on shooting strange looks at him. He arrived almost an hour earlier than necessary. He's obviously stressed out and he has a good reason for that. The list of things he can lose is too long but he's not willing to sacrifice one thing for the other. He needs it all. He wants it all.

Lorena steps out of the elevator perfectly on time. She's such a spectacle, Joe couldn't miss it if he'd try. He's still under the impact of yesterday's happenings. The way it felt when something broke inside, and how she left without a word, sneaking away from under his body, leaving him with a question that was too important to ignore, but too painful to face. Whatever has shattered within, can it be repaired? Is there a glue that can fix what's broken?

The man gets on his feet instantly, rushing toward the lawyer but he's crushing right into a wall of ignorance. Just like he's transparent. The only thing that touches him is the scent. Her scent. Stroking him from head to toe, drowning his senses by the perception. Her heels echoing as she's marching toward the secretary's desk with easy steps.

* * *

><p>Joe holds the door open for the woman, guiding her inside of the spacious office, taking the lead for himself. Just like it's his own one. But the enthusiasm he has fades away rapidly. It takes less than thirty seconds for the man to realize that this one is not going to

be an ordinary meeting and definitely not the one he was prepared to attend. He won't have the chance to take a prominent position and act as a mediator, guiding both parties through the process. There won't be formal introductions and nervous dialogues.<p>

Jacob steps away from his desk to greet the lawyer, giving her a brief hug instead of a handshake, keeping his eyes on Joe with an unreadable expression.

"What a pleasant surprise to see you again, Ms. Maze. It's been a while."

"Thank you for the quick response."

"You didn't give us much time to hesitate, did you?"

"There's nothing to hesitate about when it comes to business. But I'm sure you know it better." Lorena accepts the offered seat, shooting a quick look at Joe, seeing him fuming by the situation. He's nothing but a sideman in a parade he was wishing to take over.

"I didn't know you already knew each other." His smile is anything but convincing while he's sitting down next to the woman. The statement causes a muscle to flinch by his temple. It's barely visible, yet it's still caught by the observant eyes of Lorena.

"I'm surprised to hear that since Ms. Maze came to me asking for financial support toward a then new innovation at Cardiff. And I would have agreed on providing it if only it would have ever become official. But it never did. Of course, there is no Cardiff anymore. You knew about that, I suppose. As you have been the head of that company. Among others."

The lawyer refuses to return Joe's look. How could he possibly know about her sacrificing her pride to compensate him for something she thought he deserved when he was busy betraying her with the most tasteless and disgusting surprise he could produce, disgracing a memory that was cherished enough to make her leave everything behind in hopes of recovery. She will never be able to erase his treachery from her mind. It's forever embedded in her subconscious, haunting her like a demon in the dark. The remains of what he did will always follow like a scar, marking him forever as a reminder that he can not be trusted. Not by her.

"I rather focus on the present if you don't mind. Mutiny wants to make sure that the network you provide is not a trap but a consensual agreement between partners, which means that neither party can miss or break their obligations without going against the law."

Jacob's face is impressed, listening to Lorena's words with full attention. His smile is almost fatherly but the dark sparkle seems somehow permanent in his eyes. He leans forward on his desk, sliding a file close to the woman's reach.

"I value the professionals. We can't build an enterprise on humanity and trust, can we? The only thing I'm not concerned about is you choosing to waste your time on a company that's way under your capability. Please excuse the remark, but you should be aiming to change for the better. Always higher. I can't hide the adversity for my tardiness. I would rather see you representing WestGroup. It fits

more into your style and efficiency."

"I agree with you though I'm sure you see the difference between an easy win and a conquest."

"Your father must be proud of you." The wide smile on the man's face could be easily mixed up with honest amusement, but there's something in it that makes him look like a predator. Something that makes Joe's stomach turn, assisting through the show mutely. His presence is more than ignored. "I guess we're done with the business matters so we can chat about nicer topics. How was Italy?"

The question hits her on the chest but her poker face is remarkable. The unexplainable displeasing feeling grows slowly.

"Strange. I don't remember the last time I shared a place with my parents. It was beautiful though it doesn't feel like home anymore. Did you talk to my father?"

"I did. We talked like fathers should. And surprisingly, when I mentioned the name Joe MacMillan he recognized that." His smile could cut through steel doors and concrete walls. He doesn't turn to Joe but the reference is clearly addressed to him. Lorena refuses to react with an explanation, lifting her brows to signal that she's waiting for the rest of the story but Jacob gives them none. "People like you or me can't take sitting in one place, doing nothing for a long time. Did you come back because of the bittersweet fate of Cardiff?"

The lawyer is suddenly hit by the realization of how much it's not about her. The questions are all building around one topic, one specific target and she can't do anything else but bait the rabbit out of the bush. He already knows the answers, he's most likely completely uninterested in them. What he wants is a reaction and he has an idea of how to get it.

"No." She shakes her head slightly. "I got a great offer about six months ago and I was happy to work in New York again."

"New York?" Jacob leans back in his chair, shooting a quick look at Joe.

"At IBM. An old friend of mine asked for a favor and I couldn't find a reason why not to go."

Both men deserve a slap on their faces, and Lorena would happily volunteer to give it to them. She's used without her permission and if there's one thing she can't tolerate is being taken as a fool.

"I'm sorry if I gave the wrong idea for your daughter and I accidentally generated family drama. I'm also sorry that you forgot to take me seriously and you needed my assistance to figure out if Joe MacMillan has ever been a guest in my bed. I can assure you that I'm not interested. I refuse to have my personal life used as a weapon against anybody. If you're interested in my love life, I have none and I'm not even planning on renewing it. Are we clear now?"

Jacob's expression changes instantly, a flinch of admiration

appearing in his eyes. He's not smiling anymore and he's visibly contemplating on whether he should say what he has to say or keep it for himself.

"Eventually, all of us fall. It's the will to stand up that tells the strong apart of the weak. The ones who don't give up. The more weigh we carry the stronger we become and as long as we can keep our focus on tomorrow's challenges instead of yesterday's losses, we are indestructible. We were built to last. The aftermath of a defeat is where winners are born if they have the power to overcome it. You know what's the biggest misconception of our age? Loneliness. There is no such thing. It's a trap. It makes people question their own abilities to function as a whole. Some people are too incompetent to realize that it's a lie. Some of us were made to be alone. It's not a punishment but a gift that only the wise can understand."

* * *

><p>The tension is perceptible, almost electric. It feels like there's a black hole between them in the elevator. Jacob is not stupid. Every part of his speech was set together carefully, groping for the answer to a question without openly asking about it. The moment he could sense the change in the atmosphere it was over. They were sold out by agitation. After all, trouble is only present where there's a fraction of past that has been shared. If he was wondering about the existence of that fraction between them, now he knows. What will he do with the information is a blur, if he's even planning on doing anything with it.<p>

Neither Lorena nor Joe has the guts to think about possible outcomes. One of them hardly cares about it and the other one is too distressed to even consider the threat. The harm is quietly throbbing within, getting ready for the outburst. Verbally, Joe could fool a lie detector anytime, but he's incapable of the same thing when it comes to his body language and by that, he is the biggest enemy of his own self. The unpleasant surprise transformed into rage, and he's getting more furious as the words slowly sink deeper into his mind. He knew nothing. Not a single word, not the smallest bit of explanation. Persona non grata, a stigma he's forced to wear over and over again.

They look like kids in a penalty, standing in two opposite corners of the descending metal box, waiting for the door to open. It hardly takes longer than a minute, maybe even less, yet the time gets lost in space. Physically, it would only take a single move to cross the distance. There's nowhere to hide. It doesn't matter if the woman turns her back on Joe, all it takes for him to reach her is to stretch his arms, brushing his fingertips against her skin, anxiously awaiting to feel her shiver under the touch. He's incapable of bringing the thought into reality, keeping his clenched fists motionless in his pockets instead. He's far from being in a condition when he can control himself.

Lorena can feel him watching, his gaze burns from behind her. She doesn't need to turn around and look at him to know he's a volcano that's about to erupt but she's busy processing the words Jacob said. The ones he addressed especially for her. The ones that made the blood evaporate from her veins. She's not ready with the conclusion yet, it's not decided whether she takes the lesson as an insult or as an honest confession. One thing is for sure, Jacob rudely stepped

over the line when he decided to involve Joe, bringing him into something he had nothing to do with, granting him a chance to see into her privacy. Something she has a good reason to protect from him. It feels like an eternity until the metal cage reaches the garage floor. The woman can't take one more minute around him, positioning herself right by the exit to leave as soon as they stop.

The door opens only for a blink before closing back again. Lorena sighs with irritation, turning around to face the man. His hand glued to the button, his eyes wicked.

"Of course, run away. That's what you do."

His tone is sharp and the provocative expression on his face leaves no doubt about his intentions. He's ready to get the lawyer out of her balance and lash his own disappointment out on her. He can't let her leave without a word, it's most definitely not going to happen.

The man steps closer, cornering her to a wall, using her most hated method when he's purposefully attempting to intimidate with nothing but his physique. It works. She's already breathing fire.

"Joe, listen to me very carefully because I'm not going to repeat it: get away from me. Now."

"No. We will talk right here, right now." Lorena stares up at him with disbelief, trying hard to control the speed of her breaths but he's way too close to be fooled despite her efforts. His massive frame blocking the way out, his arms caging her in.

She's like a captured lion, getting more dangerous and unpredictable as the snare getting tighter. Her words are irrelevant. Whatever she says, her body screams the complete opposite, arching her back with yearning, her muscles taut like the string of a bow. The last thing she wants to do is talk. They are physically unable to have a conversation that's worthy of two human beings, it has always been like this from the very beginning. They know how to argue, shout or verbally humiliate, yes. But they can not talk in a civilized way. Not with words coming out of their mouths. Their form of communication is way more hazardous. Speaking with a touch of a fingertip, or a flinch of an eye instead.

The risk of getting caught together is more than real, an extreme threat that's endangering their whole existence but the contact is unbreakable. Joe removes a hand from the wall, reaching down with it slowly, only hesitating for a moment to see the woman's reaction, her gaze captivated by his eyes. The stroke is covetous and demanding as his palm slides from her knee all the way up on her thigh before moving behind her, gripping on her buttock fiercely. Lorena swallows the moan that's about to erupt from her throat, instinctively wrapping a leg around the man as much as her skirt allows it to happen. She grabs the man by the waist, pulling him closer to get a vivid impression of his rigidity against her abdomen. His excitement leaves her mouth gaping.

Their foreheads touch, leaning against each other. Joe wraps his fingers around the lawyer's wrist, guiding her hand for a touch. He misses out on a breath as she's gripping him tightly. The bulge in

his pants is so incredibly massive, it's about to destroy the layers of fabric between them. His hips slightly rocking back and forth, mesmerized by the sensation. He takes her chin in his free hand, tilting her head up, forcing her to accept his look before his tongue penetrates her mouth, hungry for the taste, the exquisite treat. He was starving for too long again, ready to devour her but it's barely easing the void. Nothing can satisfy him anymore, nothing less than feeling every inch of her trembling under him, her naked skin begging for more while he's buried deep in her core.

"Touch me..." The whisper sends a shiver down the man's spine. Hearing her asking for it is the finest aphrodisiac.

Joe tucks the tight skirt up on her thighs but it's not an easy task. If he'd follow his instincts, he'd rip it off of her with a single move but he can't do that. Not here. He needs all of his self-control to keep his hands in check, crouching down a bit instead to reach her better. She's panting but she's not alone with it. Her fingers entangled with his hair, holding onto it firmly. The urge to feel him is nothing but a throbbing pain, a grotesque mixture of mind-blowing pleasure and agony.

The tip of his thumb brushes against her through the silky fabric of her panties, making the lawyer hiss with pleasure. He would keep on teasing her, savoring every second of her whining and grinding but he can't keep his mind off of the blaze that radiates from her. He tugs the lingerie aside, gasping with ecstasy. She's having an out of body experience, moaning loudly while Joe moves with expertise. He's greedy, not wasting time on his usual game, entering her without a warning, his fingers sliding in and out, curling inside of her, alternating the speed to his own liking, his thumb drawing circles on her nub. Her wetness drives him insane, the thought of her being aroused by him this much is a victory itself.

"...yes..."

"...mmh... I can fuck you so much better..."

By the time he conceives what happened it's already too late. Lorena's first shock quickly turns into disgust, revoking her hands from the man fully like he just turned into a gigantic insect. The last time she gets in contact with him is when she pushes him away with a firm move, trembling with both rage and the remainings of desire.

"Lorena..."

Joe takes a step toward her, his jaw clenched with anger.

"Don't!" The lawyer keeps her tone down, gathering all of her energy to avoid screaming. Even she is surprised by her own blood-chillingly calm voice. "Listen, you spoiled, egoistic, megalomaniac dick, I despise that doomed, godforsaken day you meddled yourself into my life when I stepped over the doorstep at Cardiff. You know nothing about me."

Her fist slams on the button, opening the door of the lift. She storms out without looking back, her heels hitting the floor loudly while marching toward her car with a posture of a queen.

She passes Sara without a word.

17. Status Quo

****Status Quo****

The sudden quiet is suspicious enough. It might be remarkably pleasing but certainly not reassuring. Mutiny is never silent. Lorena drops the pen on the table, wondering why she even cares but the growing stress in her stomach leaves her bothered and restless. She's not even required to leave the kitchen in order to find a solution to the unexplainable discomfort.

The answer is standing right at the doorstep, dressed in black. The lawyer leans against the counter with her arms crossed on her chest, a suggestive smirk playing on her lips. She could count back from five while staring at each other with the man but this time, Cameron overtops herself. She's divesting Joe from the possibility of a theatrical entrance by a nicely timed shout, ignoring the appearance of Donna for the sake of her daily dosage of temper tantrums. Understandable. It's almost noon and she had none so far.

She's enraged. The simple sight of Joe MacMillan is enough to presume a conspiracy in the background and she's not even far from the truth though she's looking for validation at the wrong place.

"Did you know about this?"

"About what?" Lorena turns around to face her on the other side of the counter. She knows it's pointless. Cameron is not interested in the facts. She wants an evidence that her assumption is right and she's going to bend the situation as much as she has to in order to prove it for herself. This is what the lawyer got to understand about the functioning of the programmer. For her, the conclusion is the first step. She's unable to get to get to a decent determination through observing. She's starting out with a conclusion and builds the scene around it.

"About this!" She's pointing at the direction where the man is supposed to be but he's gone.

"I ask you one more time, _about what_?"

* * *

><p>Donna is trying desperately to preserve the illusion of professionalism. Too bad that the first impression is called 'first' for a reason. She's not calm either. Joe is not someone who takes the effort to appear in person for nothing. Right now, there nothing she can do but waiting for the storm to pass and Cameron to gather what's left of her decency and self-control. She's looking at him across the coffee table, feeling her stomach turn.<p>

He came to destroy. Of course, he's giving with one hand and taking with the other.

* * *

><p>She can't unsee the parking car in front of her garage door, instantly giving the lawyer a moment of unexpected anger. Her night got ruined in 0.5 milliseconds and it's most likely going to stay this way. It doesn't matter if it's a Porsche or an old, rusty junk, the fact that it belongs to Joe MacMillan makes it an object of contempt. She wasn't expecting him to show up. More likely, she was wishing for him not to show up. But this is how everything works around Joe. He keeps on doing the exact opposite of what would be reasonable. The way he functions seems to lack even the slightest trace of human logic but he's completely blind to his own impulsiveness and the damage he's causing with it. Especially the damage he's causing for himself. Lorena forces her brain to stop taking the thought any further. The man is not her responsibility. Whatever he does, he's doing it out his own free will and she has already wasted enough time on him, this way or the other. Their latest encounter proved just that.<p>

She stops the engine next to the thousand years old jeep, forcing herself to take a few deep breaths. The situation has to be cut short. It used to be so much easier. The perception is a slap on her face. It's time to rethink and rewire. Just not now, not today. Her shadow grows longer in the light of the streetlamps, the sound of her heels echoing in the silence. Joe is anything but hard to spot out. He's sitting on the stairs, molding into the semi-darkness. He's blocking the entrance, how could he not?

He was hoping to find Lorena home but wasn't surprised when acknowledged that she's gone. It's her day and she must have spent it with people whom she doesn't loathe. She had her little escape. But she can't possibly be that naive to think she can get away without facing him. He can read the way she walks and it says she's already irritated and angry with him. The thought paints a nasty smirk on his face. The lawyer catches it instantly, flashing her own murderous smile at the man when reaching him, looking up at his face.

"Thank you for coming, Joe, I can't wait to see you next time when you can't stay this long. How come you're here? Have your tamer provided you a discharge?" She cocks her head to the side, relishing in Joe's expression as a muscle flinches on his face by the offense.

He knows how the woman expects him to react, focusing all of his energy not to give her an opportunity to take the leading position before he could get his chance. He leans down to her ear, taking a deep breath through his nose, getting lost in her closeness, her scent. Lorena is astounded. So much so that she forgets to move away, feeling the man's head slightly brushing against hers, a wave of desire running through her insides. His whisper is burning the skin near her neck.

"Did you get my gift?"

The woman turns her head to catch his gaze, maybe it's just her imagination but the green irises seem to fluorescent in the dark.

"Did you come here to ask this question?"

"Are you going to evade answering it?"

Lorena snorts with frustration. The man is far from being a newcomer in the art of annoyance. They can stand about as long as their legs can tolerate, he won't give up. It's not his type. He won't get tired of being forced to wait outside, he won't turn around and leave until things start working out the way of his liking. It's checkmate. He's ready to stay outside all night with her if that's how she's planning on avoiding the inevitable.

"Did I ever mention how intensely and unalterably I hate you?"

He answers with a light giggle, knowing that he's already stepped over the line but can't risk a failure. The balance is too fragile. Joe has to make sure not to push Lorena too hard or he'll be the maker of his own downfall. Once she's provoked to let her claws out, they're done.

"I'm exhausted and it's been way too much of your presence yesterday. Could you fast forward a bit and stop harassing my private property? I'm listening."

"No."

"No?"

The lawyer stares at him with awe, looking for the smallest trace of hesitation but she finds none. Joe crosses his arms on his chest, the move making him appear even wider while returning a highly provocative glare. He's refusing to move and he's refusing to say another word. Obviously, he's learning from the best. If he can keep up the progress, Lorena might have an actual reason to take his random appearances seriously. She hasn't lost the ongoing encounter yet, but she's not in the winning position either.

"Fine. You have five minutes to set forth what you want." Her words leave Joe unimpressed, painting a meaningful grin on the woman's face.

"Five minutes?"

"Don't be voracious, I'm already offering you way more than what you deserve."

"You have serious misconceptions about what I deserve, Lorena."

"As I said, five minutes. Take it or leave it but make the decision quick because we're starting to look like a god damn sculpture group."

The man signals towards the door, a half smile vibrating discretely in the corner of his lips, bending down just the slightest bit to the lawyer.

"After you!"

She's not wasting time to the awaited reaction, skips it easily instead with a half turn, walking up to the door like only she can. It doesn't matter how long she's been wearing the black, patent leather heels, it still looks like she's strutting on clouds, barely touching the ground while taking those usual, long steps. She's followed by Joe like a shadow.

The lawyer picks a spot for the man in one of the armchairs, gesticulating with a hand that he's either taking the place or might as well turn around and leave. Joe approaches the furniture with great care before throwing himself in the middle of the couch, raising his brows to the woman as a sulky frown appears on her face. He's rearranging the cushions just to provide more space to fit, purposefully angering her even more.

"Don't get yourself too comfortable, it will be a lot less awkward when I throw you out."

"I came from Mutiny."

"Good for you."

"Don't you want to sit down?"

"Thank you for offering me a seat in my own home but no, thank you. I rather get done with this as soon as possible."

A muscle flinches at his temple. The game is nothing new, yet the roles have changed vastly. The lawyer has turned immune to his most favored tricks, making it harder to find a grasp around her, constantly sliding out of his grip without a struggle. His hands are tied and there's a leash around his neck. The list of things he has to lose is long enough to make it worth think every move twice. He's been already played out and he won't agree on repeating it one more time. The rage is still present, beclouding his objectivity, suspecting her assistance in the process.

"They cheated on the benchmarks." Joe watches her carefully, ready to catch the woman red handed but she doesn't seem to resonate. "Did you know about it?"

"What makes you think I have?"

The man flashes a beast like smile in return, his eyes bitter with irony.

"Of course. Why wouldn't you answer with a question? Must be an occupational hazard. Remind me not to debate with a lawyer when I'm curious about the truth." The words are sharp. The simple assumption of her being a liar feels somewhat uncomfortable, especially when it's coming from the king of deceit, causing her to make an effort for the sake of her cool.

"What's the matter, Joe? Who took your beloved shovel and bucket at the playground?"

"I'm granting Mutiny the very possibility to exist. I'm sure you can see the weight of that. What obviously none of you can see is the fact that as much as I'm offering a chance, I also have the power to take it away. I find it utterly disturbing how everybody seems to be busy with my obligations, yet I can ask for nothing in return. This is not a charity. I'm setting up the rules for Mutiny and not the other way around."

"I see. On the first place, you provide nothing. Don't be ridiculous, we both know that the network does not belong to you to

be a cavalier about it. It's not yours. You're just a secondary character in this story and in no way should you feel entitled to be treated as someone who is worthy of fundamental trust. Stop playing the martyr, Joe, it doesn't fit you."

"So you knew it."

"Believe it or not, I didn't. Do you want me to get an ice pack for the bruises on your ego?"

"For what you did when you left me in that elevator? For the situation you put me?"

Their staring contest mutely intensifies. He wasn't planning on bringing the scene up, but it's still throbbing under the skin vividly. Everything that happened and everything that should have happened between them. He was barely living, so anxious and desperate for an explanation. Furious for a stolen touch. The promise of life appeared in front of his eyes, under his palms before dissolving into nothingness, leaving the hunger howling inside of his chest.

"Let me make it clear for you once and for all. I'm not putting you into situations. In case you're not satisfied with your whole fuckery, I highly recommend you pointing your fingers at yourself instead of me."

"Is there anything you take responsibility for, Lorena? You and your favorite lecture about consequences."

"Excuse me? Are you calling me out on this? Maybe for once, you should try not to project your misery out on everyone else."

"How did you like your present?"

The sudden change of topic catches the lawyer by surprise, slapping her anger on the face with an invisible palm while exchanging a long look with the man. She's truly amazed, that one is for sure. Joe's ignorance knows absolutely no boundaries when it comes to shamelessly allowing himself to step over lines that nobody should, and nobody else dares. He's not thinking ahead for a single minute. When the world keeps on continuously contemplating the risks they want to take, he's agreeing on the plunge blindly, not wasting a second thought about the end of the jump, whether he might end up in water from his fall or shatter into pieces on concrete.

"Did you come here to ask me this question?"

"Maybe I did."

"Maybe you did?" The expression on Lorena's face is pure sarcasm, cocking her head slightly to the side. "Do I really need to make an impromptu presentation about how long I've stopped taking your bullshit? I'd think you to be a lot more provident, considering that you have also sent me a baseball bat." She's trying to get the situation straight and though her effort looks convincing, the endeavor leads to nowhere.

She has made a serious mistake and it's far from being the first time. The same exact blunder all over again but it's too late to leave it, there's not a chance for correction. The shadow of a

haughty smile is spreading slowly on Joe's face as he's getting on his feet. The coffee table can't set his momentum back, reaching the woman with half a step, keeping an illusion of distance between them.

She can bypass the topic or bend the words but there's no point in trying to camouflage her body language. The green eyes are scanning her from head to toe just like they'd already know the answer to a question he's not even asked yet, setting her insides on fire without a single touch. Though the way she's raging mutely is a treat itself, the man can't let himself get carried away. This has to be the moment of self-control and the moment of judiciously reasoned moves.

Lorena is waiting for a sole mistake to end the part. A straw for her right mind to grasp at. She might have been cornered but it doesn't mean she's unable to turn it all around whenever she pleases to. Her palms are itchy but the wolf is already in the house. She could bang her head into the nearest wall for acting so carelessly but not even that would be able to stop the images on the canvas of her mind. She's outraged at the man but she doesn't feel any different about herself.

"Happy birthday."

The woman's staring up at Joe's face, feeling the strange warmth of embarrassment spreading in her stomach, unsure of what the acceptable reaction would be. She's acting against her guts, turning her head away as an instant reaction to the man's approach. He's not bothered by the response, continuing the move that he started, reaching her cheek for a kiss.

The gesture is way too personal. Too intimate. Too far from their usual behavior.

She's strangely agitated, yet forces her glance back at the man, denying him the pleasure of indulging in his own effect, disregarding the scream of her conscious in the back of her head about not to get in eye contact with the enemy again. His eyes are groping for a weak spot, a crack on her carefully built wall.

It's an out of body experience. The words are coming out on their own. Lorena knows exactly what to do. They have been playing in the same game together long enough to be aware of the honey trap, still her sanity is one step behind and by the time she's conceiving the problem, the mistake is already made.

"Out of pure curiosity, how did you know my size?"

Joe swallows hard. His hands raising up, showing the palms to the lawyer. She's anything but convinced by the mute confession.

"You're kidding me, right?"

"So you put it on?"

He's closing the distance between their bodies, visibly struggling to keep away from grabbing her but it would be a shame to screw up right before the finish line, feeling her chest moving against his with every breath. And she's breathing quickly, selling her excitement out. But he would be a fool to think that she won't pull a magic

trick out of her hat and snatch the medal off of his neck. All it takes is patience. But that's something he's not specifically familiar with.

"Maybe I'm wearing it right now."

"Don't make statements that you're not willing to prove."

She's pouting playfully. "Thank you for the input, Mr. MacMillan. It's really believable, coming from you."

Lorena takes a step back, hysterically measuring the possibilities of what should be done before picking the worst one.

"How badly do you want to see it?"

Joe's not hesitating. He won't think twice and give time for the woman to correct herself. He's already holding onto the offered chance.

His fingers lock around her wrist gently, raising her palm to his lips for a kiss before guiding it down to the bulge in his jeans. "Very badly." He's far from exaggerating. The sheer thought is enough to make him hard.

"Fine." She's gripping him tightly for a second to prove her point, provoking a loud moan out of him.

There's nothing more to say. A single look is enough to let him know the order and he's been starving long enough to follow the instructions without the pointless cockiness. They're aching for the same thing. Both of them being the hunter and the prey at the same time.

Lorena turns her back on the man while unzipping the black dress, letting it fall to the ground effortlessly. She doesn't move. Unlike Joe, she's capable of playing not to be in a rush, driving him insane with the carefully measured movements even though he's aware of them being designed specifically for his torment.

The excitement is almost palpable. He's fuming on the couch, ready to breathe fire. If only he could find a way to relish in the process instead of being blinded by his own greed. His body and his mind are not playing on the same team, they're mortal enemies and he's stuck between obedience and rebellion.

Attempting to domesticate the beast. His struggle is a sight worth looking at, drawing the lawyer nearer like a magnet. What should be done and what should be avoided is completely relative at this point. Joe reaches out, pulling her closer by the hips to admire the view. It looks as if the emerald lace and satin have been painted on her, fitting every curve perfectly, looking more appetizing than he ever dared to imagine. She's a queen with all the power to destroy worlds with nothing but a snap of a finger.

She can tear him down or have him at her mercy.

Her skin is longing for a touch, a relief from the need that's slowly driving her insane. She's gripping at his hair, letting his lips explore, placing kisses all over her lower abdomen. He can smell her

anticipation, the sweet scent of lust, dripping just for him. It's not enough, he has to feel her. He has to get an impression of how much he's wanted and how much he's been missed.

His thumb strokes along her core, increasing the blaze even more. He's a teaser, torturing the woman's senses through the delicate fabric, eagerly moving with Joe. She drops her head back by the long anticipated contact. Her wetness makes him groan, unable to hold the urge back, sliding a finger inside before having a sample of the luscious taste.

Lorena holds onto his shoulders, feeling the muscles tensing up. She's marking his skin through the shirt, carefully enough to avoid leaving a single evidence of her own weakness for anyone to see. The pressure is almost too much to take.

Joe gets on his feet quickly, grabbing the lawyer by her behinds, raising her body to his. Her long legs wrapping around his waist tightly to pull him even closer. He eases the thirst with a kiss, sucking on her lip covetously.

He's never been invited to the bedroom but he easily overlooks the fact. It's a natural instinct. He has to get into her realm, leaving bits and pieces of himself all over it so she will remember. She will feel him around.

The bed graciously stifles her fall, at least physically. Joe is already on top, stroking the lingerie off of Lorena with an insatiable hunger. It doesn't matter how many times he can manage to have a taste, the more he gets, the more he wants and it slowly turns his conscious into a white-hot blur. It turns him into nothing but a slave of his own desires while savoring every particle of the woman, getting lost in the way only she can whisper his name. And he will make her repeat it a thousand times, turning the whispers into screams.

Her impact is impressive and so is his hardness. A plain thought of the lawyer is enough to put him into a carnal trance while envisioning her in hopes that she's doing the same. That she's lying in this very bed with him on her mind, her own hands resembling his, touching the most aching spots, caressing them with great care until the final, bittersweet release. But she's not a fantasy right now. She's real, squirming with delight, touching him wherever she can reach, demanding for more while taking the shirt off Joe. Their bodies are slowly molding into one, every curve matching perfectly in a way that should never be allowed. His lips are famished, slowly making their way down, stopping every now and then for a bite. He's captivated by the nipples, firm by the fervor of the moment, his tongue moving with ease before sucking on them, one after the other. Lorena arches her back, her nails digging deep into his skin, her legs locked around him, feeling his shaft grazing against her entrance. She's helpless and Joe knows perfectly how to handle her. How to fulfill the desires without giving her too much of what she wants. She'll have it all. Eventually.

He's getting closer to the main course, feasting his senses on her reactions, her moans getting louder with every move. She's all set, ripe as a peach in the summer, juicy and delicious. Her feet resting on the man's shoulders while he's purposefully driving her insane. He's gentle and rough at the same time, the balance is excellent. The

woman's hips are moving up and down impulsively, getting more frustrated by his game.

"...I will... hunt you... down... Joe..."

"Sue me." He's openly grinning, placing a long lick on her inner thigh.

"...you intractable dick..."

She's hardly touched while the panties get pulled to the side, yet it's setting her whole existence on fire. Lorena is aching, craving to finally have him on any and every way. A finger reaches her core, massaging her nub gently before his tongue penetrates her. She cries out in ecstasy, her eyes closed. The blackout is just a suck away but she's not the only one who's about to blow up. Joe won't let her finish it without him. He's repositioning, holding onto her ankles, keeping the woman's legs on his shoulders.

Her juices lubricating him, sliding in without a warning. They grasp together, remaining motionless for a second to revel in the long-awaited sensation. Their eyes meet. The silent conversation is way too dangerous but there's no turning back.

His hips shifting with small, slow thrusts at the beginning but he's carried away quickly. The pushes are getting more and more powerful, moving with a heavy momentum. The deep groans resonating from the walls. Joe leans forward, letting Lorena swap the position of her legs, locking them around his body to push him even further inside. Her scream is muffled by his mouth, breathing in and out. She can still taste herself on his lips.

"...you're so fucking good..."

He's swelling inside of her as she moans, her walls are getting tight. She wants more but her body has already reached the limit. One more move and she's done, her insides explode around Joe but he won't stop. He's taking her even higher, to a place she's never been before. Their foreheads touch and he can't move anymore. He's buried deep within her core, finally releasing himself, riding it out together with her.

He's barely breathing but it's not the main reason that holds him back from speaking up. The words are stuck in his throat and he's lying on her chest, their bodies still shaking. Her body feels like a home he never had and he wraps it in a blanket of gentle strokes. A careful hand is running through his hair.

"I appreciate having you on top of me but I'm suffocating." Her voice is quiet, almost succeeding with hiding the tremble in it.

* * *

><p>She buries her face into the curve of his neck, inhaling the irresistible scent. The familiar aroma of his skin combined with hers and the thin layer of glittery sweat, sprinkled on them by the hands of lust, all blended into one, creating the most effective aphrodisiac of nature. His heart pounding against her chest as a wordless confession of a million thoughts, fingertips wandering all over her body at the slowest pace, enjoying every last bit of shiver

that awakens under each touch. Soft lips are brushing against his in the aftermath of their fever, unable to subside.<p>

The feeling of anger is throbbing in the distance, making her stomach sink. This is not real. The pleasure is not hers but someone else's. It's borrowed and she's only stealing moments before returning it to wherever it belongs to. She feels hollow by the realization that having him like this is only a palliation, not a cure for the disease. She's not going to have a golden medal but being offered a consolation prize every now and then while going against her own standard, breaking her own rules. Giving up on her own self.

Weakness. That's what he is. A futile, weak spot. A constant threat. And he has to be handled exactly like every other weakness before in her life.

Erase.

End
file.